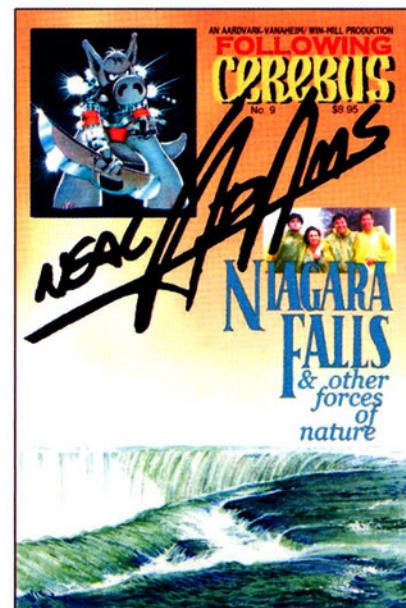
issue's cover on, intentionally, upside down and then making the "Mind Games Issue" cover type the only thing that's right-side up is a good example. Likewise starting an untitled and un-credited editorial in mid-sentence being another good example. Having that untitled and un-credited editorial that starts in mid-sentence be written by Dave Sim—who isn't actually a Following Cerebus *editor—is another example of the same thing.*

All of these are "Mind Games."

It's certainly worth speculating as to the origin of the term and my best guess would be Yoko Ono who, in many ways, epitomized the rapid reversal of gender polarity in our society—emotion unseating reason—by her effect upon the consummate 1960's icon, John Lennon. Arguably a foundational element of the feminism that—in many ways—issued forth from their relationship could be attributed to the misidentification of "logic" as "mind games." For the emotion-based who had (and have) no strong kinship with logic and who had been drawn to the Beatles simplistic view that "All You Need is Love" "mind games" was a good way to ensnare and confound logic. "I don't accept what you're saying. You're just playing mind games." Heart *games were fine.* Mind *games became verboten.*

And I suspect that this very much appealed to the surrealist that John Lennon always was at heart. If the term "mind games" worked on him—tying him up in knots and effectively neutralizing as Machiavellian and un-serious and arbitrary any attempt at logic (when actually it was merely rational and "un-Yoko")—why wouldn't it work on the rest of the population if you could, say, make it into a best-selling pop song? Powerful magic indeed for the born-again pagan to wield. "Pushing the barriers/of peace and love" *is exactly what it did, displacing logic.* "I want you to make love/not war." *Logic would indicate that there are times to make love and there are times to make war, dictated by necessity (such as 9/11), but if you made it into an "either/or" "mind game" you could refute the self-evident logic through bypassing it completely. Making love—whether it's marital love, fornication with a groupie, group sex, adultery—is always right, and making war—whether you are conquering a less-advanced society for material gain, advancing the cause of democracy, or defeating totalitarianism or freeing an enslaved people—is always wrong.* "Love is surrender/you've gotta let it/you've gotta let it go/Love is a flower/you've got to let it, you've gotta let it grow." *Let go of logic and give yourself over completely to love. And once you've permitted love to displace logic in your life, let that love grow until it has eliminated logic completely as a component in your life.*

Another good example of a "mind game" would be to end that ersatz editorial, likewise, in mid-sentence, confounding the reader's own idea of whether the publication that followed were being true to its own

No More Games:

Mind Games and Beyond in Cerebus

I. Only Games

Early on, the "Mind Games" issues of *Cerebus* helped establish that the series was not going to be standard comic book fare. Issue 20 contained the first such story, and a quick glance made it clear that Dave Sim was engaging in experimental storytelling. As other "Mind Game" issues followed (in *High Society, Church & State,* and *Flight),* they continued not only to have distinctive visuals, but to contain an ongoing story thread by themselves—their own subtle subplot that, we will argue, became the dominant story element by the end of *Mothers & Daughters.*

For us, the "Mind Games" issues were intertwined with the ongoing series of "Cerebus Dreams" and "Odd Transformations" stories, and early descriptions of this *FC* 8 essay promised a piece that would tie all of these elements together. However, as we began working—and at Dave's urging—we discovered that we needed to separate the stories, at least for the time being. The dreams aspect in particular was much, much too large to include here and needed an entire issue (if not multiple issues) to explore in depth. As such, that has been bumped back to *FC* 10 or 11. Eventually, somewhere down the road, perhaps we can then tie everything together as we'd hoped to here.[1]

So for now, we'll stick to just the "Mind Games" stories.

Neal Adams's classic "hidden Deadman" page from Strange Adventures *216*

II. Mind Game I

The first Mind Game, as noted above, appeared in *Cerebus* 20. This issue's importance grew as the *Cerebus* epic neared the end of *Church & State,* and even more so by *Mothers & Daughters.* Cirin, Suenteus Po, *The New Matriarchy*, and Illusionism all find their introductions in this issue, and in retrospect it's astounding to see all of this appear in a single twenty-page sequence. However, the issue came out in September 1980, by which time, according to Sim, he'd already had the basic Cerebus storyline worked out (at least the first two hundred issues). Cirin's political ambitions are already clear, as is her animosity toward Po and Illusionism.

The long-ranging implications of the issue were not immediately apparent to readers, of course. The story seemed little more than an obvious homage to Neal Adams's Deadman that appeared in the late sixties in *Strange Adventures* (Adams's influence on Sim was already evident by *Cerebus* 20) and a way for Sim to speed up the time spent at the drawing board by not having to do backgrounds: Cerebus floating in a sea of black—that's the ticket.

The *New Matriarchy* excerpt itself that begins the chapter is a bit of a confusing jumble compared to the writings that appear years later in *Women.* "As we learn to face toward the hub of the wheel, it is incumbent upon us all to show the path of reason, of love, and of obedience to those who are able to perceive the symmetry of mother, child and the true path. It is our goal not only to find our own illumination, but to give illumination to others." The essence of Cirinism is suggested, but the passage here is vague enough that it was unlikely going to conflict with the details that would inevitably come. (Dave's introduction, written for *Swords of Cerebus* 5

[1]Or not. At one point, as work on this essay was being done, Dave sent this note: "The Mind Games were about contact with other consciousnesses and ostensibly higher and more adept consciousnesses, which isn't what dreams are to me."

Following Cerebus

Vol. 1 #8 May 2006

Special thanks to Margaret Liss, Brian M. Kane, and Caroline Farrington (Penguin Books).

Following Cerebus **produced by**

Craig Miller

&

John Thorne

Cerebus **comic book by**

Dave Sim

&

Gerhard

FOLLOWING CEREBUS, Vol. 1 #8, May, 2006. Published by Win-Mill Productions, P.O. Box 1283, Arlington, TX 76004. Phone (817) 274-7128. Craig Miller, Publisher.

Price $3.95 per copy in the United States. Published quarterly.

Printed at Brenner Printing.

Dave Sim's "hidden Cerebus" puzzle from "Mind Games I" (Cerebus *20)*

in 1981 and reprinted in *Cerebus Bi-Weekly* 20, comments almost entirely on the visual construction of the story instead of—again in retrospect—the far more interesting thematic issues.)

Three-and-a-half decades after the initial publication of the Adams Deadman stories, the design that inspired the art might seem a little obscure, though DC's recent *Deadman Collection* in an elegant slipcased hardcover edition (along with the continual influence of Adams's art) makes the original source material less obscure. Deadman himself inspired *Cerebus* 22, "The Death of Elrod," as the character, killed by an assassin, finds he is able to have his spirit inhabit various living people (a power Deadman himself had). In *Strange Adventures* 213, Deadman inhabits his unconscious—but not yet dead—friend Tiny, who has been shot and is hovering between life and death as surgeons scramble to save his life. Deadman seeks out Tiny's "Id, his personality, the part that is the essence of Tiny" and implores him to fight for his survival. Like similar sequences in Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's Doctor Strange, it's all metaphysical mumbo-jumbo (as was popular with the counter-cultural crowd in the late sixties), and Sim quickly finds the comedic angle as Deadalbino inhabits one person after another (including President Weisshaupt: "Look—I say—look at me now—I'm the president!").

The primary importance of Deadman to "Mind Games I" lies in its art. To portray Deadman's entrance into Tiny's mental landscape, Adams used a series of symbolic panels having the character fending off various abstract impediments. Interestingly, these panels were reproduced in black-and-white,

setting them off from the "real world" panels in color. A comparison between these panels and the art in *Cerebus* 20 reveals obvious similarities.

The other inspiration has often been written about—how the individual pages from issue 20, when placed together, form a single giant Cerebus figure, "the largest picture of Cerebus I had ever done before or since," wrote Sim in 1981. Adams himself had done something similar at least twice—one in a series of *Ben Casey* daily comic strips that formed a "hidden head," and again in *Strange Adventures* 216, in which Deadman, finding himself in a strange land called Nanda Parbat, comes face to face with "the balancer of good over evil, Rama Kushna." The journey to get to her has him traveling through bizarre landscapes that, on one page, combine to form one large Deadman head.

Sim uses these design elements to good effect, symbolizing Cerebus's movement back and forth between the Cirinists and Illusionist Suenteus Po in

From Cerebus *28 (*High Society*)*

From Strange Adventures *213 (Adams art)*

the aardvark's state of unconsciousness (at the end of issue 19, Cerebus was drugged by Cirinist priestess/prostitute Perce). Cerebus is in "the seventh sphere" (whatever *that* means—it comes across as yet another bit of Dr. Strange-like pseudo-metaphysics), though Cerebus—and the reader—don't learn many details this first time out. As noted, it's clear that Cirin and Po are antagonists, and that followers of Illusionism aren't much of a contest for hardened Cirinist warriors. Cerebus manipulates Po and the Cirinists in order to escape them both, but his immediate plans are thwarted when Cirinist Wenda drugs him again, and he wakes up in Beduin, miles north of Togith (where he had been drugged).

(About a year after the publication of *Cerebus* 20, Sim and Gene Day collaborated on "What Happened Between Issues 20 and 21" for *Swords of Cerebus* Volume 3. It turns out that Astoria transported the unconscious aardvark to Beduin—a foreshadowing of her manipulation of him throughout *High Society* and *Church & State).*

III. Mind Game II

Shortly after Cerebus arrives at the Regency Hotel in Iest, he collaborates in his own kidnapping with the hopes of finagling the money out of his dimwitted kidnappers, Fleagle and Drew McGrew (a parody of Ted Koppel's "America held Hostage" series of reports that became *Nightline).* Cerebus almost succeeds until Fleagle knocks the aardvark unconscious, sending him into "Mind Game II."

Po tells Cerebus that they're now in the Eighth Sphere, suggesting a progression since MG I. Po explains that "to an illusionist, the Seventh Sphere is, first, a retreat from the modern world...[in order

to find] the essence of live and living ...[and seek] after Truth, Reality and Essence." The Eighth Sphere is a kind of intense meditation that seeks to eliminate "mental clutter." Po continues: "The Seventh Sphere is where one seeks his own equilibrium. Once attained, the world is seen as a cross-roads of an infinite number of paths. The Eighth Sphere is a specific path revealed at a more complex level."

Cerebus isn't particularly interest in the metaphysics, however—he says he "can live with" the mental clutter. He just wants to know how he got from Togith to Beduin during his previous time of unconsciousness. Po doesn't know—perhaps it was done by the Cirinists (Cerebus rejects this theory) or the Kevillists.

Cerebus has never heard of the Kevillists, so Po explains that they are "a rebellious faction that's only recently come to light in Upper Felda—in Cirin's own government. A fanatic's fanatics. They believe in the death penalty for wearing clothing that isn't grey or brown." Why would they be interested in Cerebus? "To keep the Cirinists from getting you" is one of Po's theories. (As readers learn later, Astoria is the author of *Kevillist Origins*, so Po is on the right track here.)

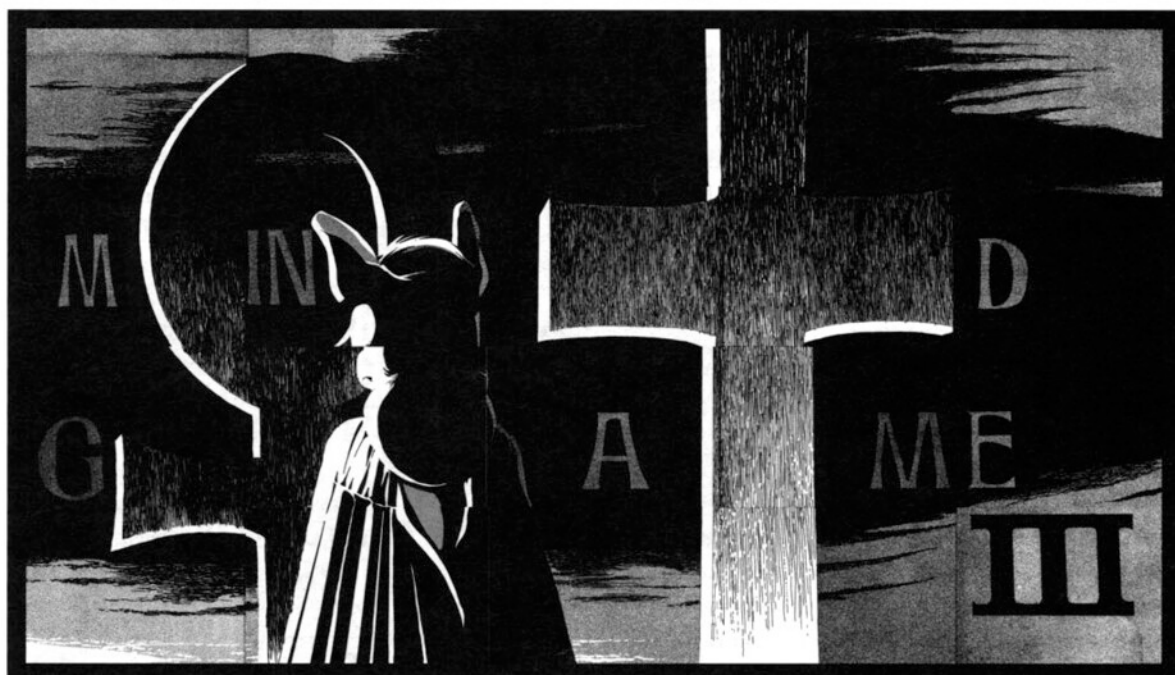
As with "Mind Games I," however, the most interesting part of "Mind Games II" is not the (again murky) metaphysics, but the presentation of the political backdrop. Cerebus brushes aside the conflicts between the Cirinists, Kevillists, and Illusionists because, according to him, it's the Orthodox Tarimites who "run the show." This allows Sim, through Po, to present the social and political landscape by describing the rift in the Church of Tarim (with conflicting seats of power in both Iest and Serrea), Cirin's quest for power, and the ostensible powerlessness of the Illusionists. Cerebus becomes suspicious of Po's truthfulness, however.

In the end, Cerebus wonders in which group he should throw his lot. Po argues against the Cirinists and suggests the Eastern Church of Tarim—though even that may not be ideal. Ironically, in *Church & State,* Cerebus finds himself not merely aligned with the Eastern Church, but its Pope.

Visually, the story adds backgrounds for Cerebus (symbols of his mental clutter, as noted above), but the pages do not combine to form a single large image.

IV. Mind Game III/IV

The next "Mind Game" story occurs at a particularly key moment in the saga: Bishop Powers has just nominated Cerebus, currently the prime minister of Iest, as Eastern Pontiff. Cerebus, bored and frustrated with political life, married life, manipulation by Weisshaupt, and in a rather self-absorbed, self-pitying mood, decides to drink himself into a stupor. Well into the process, he's told, "You're the western church's nominee for eastern pontiff." He concludes he's hearing things, but soon enough he is, indeed, the pope, and finds the inherent power in the position too tempting to resist using for his own personal gain.

This story differs dramatically from the other "Mind Games" stories. There is no dream-like metaphysical travel, contact with Po, or conversations about political maneuvering. Cerebus is talking to himself (though in "Mind Game II," Cerebus does theorize that his conversations with Po are just dreams of his talking to imaginary voices in his head). Visually, the combined images on the halves of each of the pages form a large illustration of Cerebus as pope with the words "Mind Game III." As such, the issue connects with "Mind Game I." (The story itself is titled "Mind Game IV," propelling the readers to ask, "Where's 'Mind Game III?' and having to solve the puzzle to get the answer. As Sim explained in the bi-weekly reprint series

The assembled puzzle from Cerebus *63 (*Church & State*)*

Cerebus: Church & State 13, "The puzzle is Mind Game III. The story is Mind Game IV.")

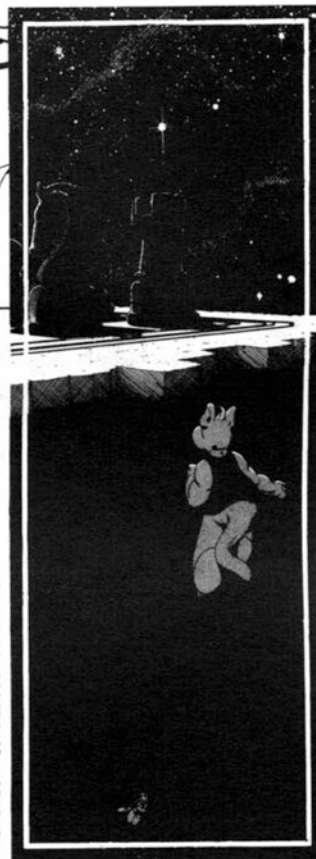
V. Mind Game V/VI

There is a huge gap between the fourth and fifth Mind Games—the fourth appears in the first quarter of *Church and State; Jake's Story, Melmoth,* and *Reads* contain none. But in *Flight*, "Mind Game V" and "VI" not only appear back-to-back, but the "game" takes on literal form and continues through to the end of the book, making this the longest mind game sequence in all of *Cerebus.*

Above: a comic book ancestor (of sorts) to the Mind Games issues: Dr. Strange from Strange Tales *126 (script by Stan Lee, art by Steve Ditko). Right: in Mind Game 6 (from* Flight*), Cerebus plays chess with Suenteus Po.*

The sequence begins quite strangely, as Cerebus, surrounded by Cirinist warriors, suddenly disappears from site. It turns out he is ascending, first through whiteness, then up through the clouds and into the Seventh Sphere, where he is welcomed by Suenteus Po. But Cerebus argues that he isn't really in the Seventh Sphere, and that Po sounds "like the fake Regency Elf with a head cold." Despite Po's protestations, Cerebus continues moving "up," until Po finally admits that Cerebus has, indeed, reached the Eighth Sphere, which is "as 'up' was one can get in the Seventh Sphere." (Po reveals that they were not in the Eighth Sphere earlier—in "Mind Games II"—but merely in a "suburb" of the Seventh Sphere.)

Being the final Mind Games story, Cerebus finally gets some answers. "Each person's Eighth Sphere is his own, to have and to hold, the repository of all he has been, all he is and all he will be....There is no 'down' or 'up.'" Po leads Cerebus through an early experience of "joy"—the killing of a Borealan. He attempts to distract Cerebus with a supposed vision of the future, but Cerebus single-mindedly insists on continuing to go "up," which earns him Po's praise. Finally, when Cerebus can rise no farther, a "small duplicate" of himself forms above him and drifts toward a giant chess board, where he plays a game (and is quickly defeated in four moves).

This game is played throughout the rest of *Flight*, and as each piece is moved, Po provides Cerebus with information, but carefully chosen: "I will limit the information which I impart to you to self-description. This minimizes the risk of some catastrophe taking place, but it in no way eliminates that chance." (p. 150) Po recounts his own history—including correcting the account the Judge presented to Cerebus while on the moon—and the history of son Alfred, who started Illusionism and declared that "All Life was an Illusion" (p. 175). Po himself was reincarnated and ended up in trouble with the Eastern Church because of his reformist views; he was brought up before (of all people) Suenteus Po III, Alfred's son! This was the trial that "echoed" through to Astoria's trial before Pope Cerebus. Every succeeding life Po led was simple and uneventful. After a note about Cerebus's alliance with Bran Mak Mufin, Po checkmates Cerebus, sending the "small duplicate" plummeting back down to the "original" Cerebus, who himself then falls back to Earth and ends up in the home of (we later discover) "Serna."

These, then, are the Mind Games.

So what do they add up to, if anything?

VI. No More Games

As noted above in the quote from Sim, "The Mind Games were about contact with other consciousnesses and ostensibly higher and more adept consciousnesses." In this regard, the Mind Games were a parallel to the ongoing Cerebus storyline as a whole. Indeed, it was not only in the Mind Game issues that Cerebus encountered "higher consciousnesses." This is one of the themes that threads through the entire 300-issue epic. However, it is particularly interesting to consider the theme as it plays out through the first 200 issues.[2]

In *Church & State*, after Cerebus has become Pope and is more powerful than he has ever been, he get a visit from "Tarim"—or, at least, the giant stone Thrunk (from "Black Magiking," way back in *Cerebus* 13) who claims now to be Tarim with a hi-

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[2]It is probably not coincidental that issues 201-300 do not contain any Mind Game segments.

lariously simple explanation: "I changed my name." Ontological questions aside, the false "Tarim" literally tosses Cerebus out of Iest's Upper City. Eventually, Cerebus makes his way back up and defeats the Thrunk with the help of Weisshaupt's cannon—but not before Cerebus screams, "Who's Tarim, Necross!!? WHO?!" The Thrunk responds, "You are! YOU!" "Damn right" says Cerebus.

The crowd cheers that "Cerebus is Tarim," though it's doubtful Cerebus actually believes that to be the case. But soon, he finds himself "Talking to Tarim" in a sort of dream-like, Mind Game-ish chapter. Despite the title of the story, however, the voice claims not to be Tarim, but "a messiah" who tells the aardvark that the secret to the Final Ascension is to be standing on the *top* of the tower with the gold sphere[3] during the event.

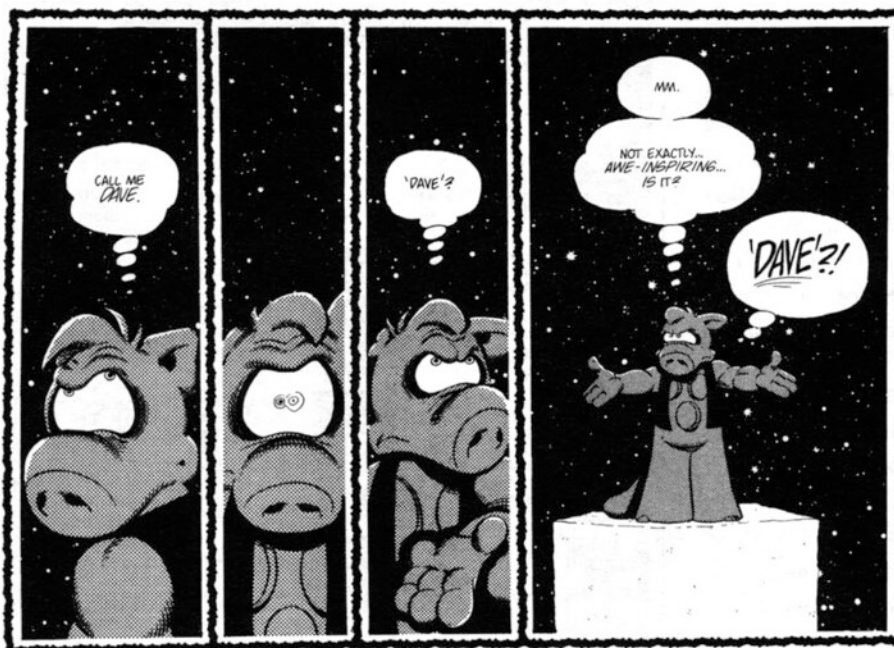
When Cerebus ends up on the moon, he meets the Judge, who tells Cerebus directly, "I'm not Tarim." He does, however, have lots of information about the past, the future, and even the creation of the universe. Though this information is undercut later on, it still serves a story function in the same way as the Mind Games issues—to allow Cerebus some contact with "ostensibly higher consciousnesses."

[3]Does the gold sphere relate back to the Seventh and Eighth Spheres in the Mind Games? There is no explicit correlation, so it may very well be coincidental. On the other hand, the implicit thematic unity is perfect and hard to ignore: the mental Spheres through which Cerebus gained insight from Suenteus Po might arguably have played a part in guiding Cerebus to possess the perfect gold sphere necessary to participate in an ultimate Final Ascension, during which the participant meets Tarim, ostensibly making subsequent Eighth Sphere journeys obsolete. (Of course, Cerebus does *not* meet Tarim during his Ascension.)

In the *Following Cerebus* 1 interview, Sim described the process of how his own change in beliefs affected the theological themes of *Cerebus* and how they changed over the course of twenty-six years. Tarim/Terim gave way to God/YHWH as Sim rejected his earlier secular humanism and atheism for faith in God. Knowing that Sim would change during the course of creating the story, he left certain elements open-ended enough to allow for those changes to be incorporated into the work. As such, Cerebus's talking to higher consciousnesses would definitely take on different forms. However, more to the point for this essay, Sim's changes did not occur until after issue 200, which makes for an interesting case study in this regard, because it appears that originally, this theme was intended to be wrapped up for the most part in those first 200 issues.

Surely it is not coincidental that the final book of *Mothers & Daughters* is titled *Minds* and features Cerebus talking to his creator, "Dave." Note that the "Games" aspect is gone. Cerebus has met the real deal (within the context of the *Cerebus* comic book), with nowhere higher to go. At this point it is just a meeting of the "Minds," first with Cerebus and Cirin in a verbal slugfest over the superiority of Tarim versus Terim (the result being that the universe "divides," with each god controlling half), and then with Cerebus trying to bargain with the Tarim that he renounced in the past.

The attempt at bargaining is a brilliant presentation of the absurdity of every person's attempt to "negotiate" a deal with an all-knowing, all-powerful god (let alone God). Honestly, what can a mortal bring to the table? Cerebus finally wonders if he's just talking to himself—hearing voices as a sign of his possible insanity. (As pointed out above, in "Mind Game II" Cerebus suggests that his conversation with Po is just a dream—that in essence, Cerebus is talking to himself.) But Dave steps in (not as a series of "voice-over" captions, but, notably, as thought balloons within Cerebus's head), identifies himself ("I'm not Tarim. I *am* your creator—but...even *that's* a shaky premise"), and tells Cerebus that the aardvark is Dave's story.

Sim knew around issue 12 or 13 that one day he and Cerebus would have this conversation, and presumably this would be Cerebus's ultimate revelation.

Cerebus meets his maker (Minds, p. 130)

The preceding encounters—with Suenteus Po and the Judge—were merely steps in Sim's "Stairway to Heaven" cosmology (as he describes it in *Following Cerebus* 1), and under that scenario, Dave is as high as Cerebus could go within the context of the story.

Indeed, in Sim's pre-theistic existence, "Dave" has all the answers for Cerebus. He explains a lot of background material about which Cerebus (and the reader) had no knowledge (including the "origin" of Cirin—which, it turns out, had its beginnings in corruption and lies). He answers Cerebus's questions about the medallions and, more importantly, the possibility of a life with Jaka. If Dave is the creator of the story, Cerebus wonders, why can't he make a Cerebus/Jaka romance possible? In a fascinating series of "what if"-like sequences, Dave shows how such a relationship is doomed as long as Cerebus's essential nature remains unchanged. The conclusion is probably inevitable: Cerebus tells Dave to go away, to leave him alone—though eventually he changes his mind and asks to be sent to the tavern at the Wall of Tsi. He convinces himself that he can change—that he will not be self-centered, that he will not waste the rest of his life waiting for Jaka—and thus sets the stage for the final 100 issues of *Cerebus*.[4]

But of course Cerebus's attempt at self-improvement is not permanent. Indeed, the trend throughout the "Mind Games" stories (and related sequences) is that, except in a few instances, the information and insights Cerebus gains do not lead to profound changes. When possible, he will use what knowledge he can for personal gain—he took the "messiah's" advice and carried the golden sphere to the top of the tower during the Ascension—but even that concluded with unexpected results: he didn't end up in Vanaheim; he didn't get to talk to Tarim; and he ended up back on Earth with no power, no gold, and no standing as Earth's Redeemer.

The "Mind Games" stories, then, serve several purposes in the narrative: they reinforce the theme of Cerebus and "higher consciousnesses"; they display Cerebus's inability for personal growth; and they allow Sim to present chunks of exposition and background information in a "reader-friendly" and story-consistent manner.

About "A Funny Thing" (pages 9-13)

Dave Sim commissioned this story from Roberta Gregory for *Following Cerebus*. Roberta's forty-issue comic book series, *Naughty Bits*, features Bitchy Bitch, who "conducts a non-stop profanity-laced anti-male, anti-Republican, anti-Church, anti-everything monologue in her left-wing feminist head" (as Sim wrote in the "Notes" section of *Latter Days*, p. 482). Yet despite the differences in beliefs, Sim wrote, "I love Roberta's *Naughty Bits* comic."

Following Cerebus hasn't presented as much comics material as we'd like (Shannon Wheeler appeared in the first issue, Will Eisner in the fourth, and Bryan Douglas's half-page strips in several), so we're pleased to present this all-new five-page story.

Thanks, Roberta!

[4]We should close the loop here by noting that, although not part of any "Mind Game" story, Dave makes one additional appearance in the story following issue 200 (two if Rick's meeting with "Viktor" counts from page 13 of *Rick's Story*). Near the end of *Rick's Story,* Dave visits Cerebus's tavern, orders a beer, and listens to Cerebus rant about how he's going crazy just standing around all day listening to the "stupid voices" in his head. Dave suggests that, while Cerebus may or may not be driving himself crazy, he might be driving *Dave* crazy (or perhaps the readers?) by staying in one place for so long. Dave then drops off a package—which turns out to be Jaka's doll Missy, just before Jaka herself returns. The key element at this point is not the imparting of information; Dave is simply using Missy to help jumpstart the Cerebus/Jaka storyline that will dominate the next 700 pages. (Missy had particular significance to Jaka, having been given to her as a child at the funeral of mother and been her constant companion throughout her childhood; it's what Cerebus held during *Melmoth* while believing Jaka was dead; and it's what Jaka returns to for "comfort" during her final scene in *Form & Void*.)

A Funny Thing...

A funny thing happened about a YEAR ago. I went to my P.O Box and there was a big, fat letter from Dave Sim!

To the best of my memory (such as it is) I've NEVER gotten mail from him. And there was MONEY inside! (Well... a MONEY ORDER...)

It was kind of like a MIRACLE. I was TOTALLY strapped for cash! Fantagraphics had stopped publishing Naughty Bits several months before... Not like I'd been making all that much from it...

I'd been working a part-time intermittent labor job (UNION, at least) at Seattle Center moving furniture and cleaning and such...

But, I wasn't making much money from THAT, either! People seem to think I have money ROLLING IN from somewhere. DON'T I WISH!

It looked like Dave was commissioning me to do a story for FOLLOWING CEREBUS! But he didn't give me a DEADLINE for it.

So, I began to wonder what sort of story I'd DO! It was so NICE of him to pay me in advance! And a lot of people would see it. It had to be something REALLY SPECIAL!

Almost a year later, I was STILL wondering.. So I figured the BEST thing would be to just sit down and DO it!

I was KIND OF familiar with Cerebus. I'd bought the occasional issue here and there. (Which made the story pretty hard to follow!)

AND I'd hung out with Dave a few times in the past, at conventions. He seemed like a really decent guy. Generous to a FAULT!

Dave was in Seattle years ago and gave everyone a copy of "Jaka's Story." I've read it a FEW times and really ENJOYED it!

Cerebus was a HUGE epic, spanning DECADES with DOZENS of characters! I decided to borrow all the other books from somewhere.. READ them and then WRITE about it!

But all year I just collected an ENDLESS pile of books to read "when I had the time.."

So, instead of trying to write about something I know NOTHING about (which doesn't stop SOME people!) I'll write what I DO know..

Dave has been one of the most INFLUENTIAL and prolific creators in comics. For a while he encouraged LOTS of folks to publish their own work.

Sure, maybe most of these comics didn't SELL that well..(Just ECONOMICS, NOT a Value Judgement!) But people finished work and LAUNCHED it out into the world!

How can you put a PRICE on the value of BOOTING someone from: "Someday I'll ____________." FILL IN THE BLANK To actually DOING it?

And, cranking out 300 ISSUES of a comic book (well, with a lot of BACKGROUND help) which is such a UNIQUE UNIVERSE and PERSONAL VISION... well, THAT'S a REAL big deal, too..

But, when I "Google" "Dave Sim," the VERY FIRST thing that comes up is the whole... MISOGYNY thing. Which is kind of unfortunate!

I must admit the first Cerebus I'd bought in a LONG TIME was Issue 186!

As far as I could make out, Dave (or some character supposed to be him) was saying women were PARASITES and some sort of VOID (men were "Light", by the way!) and... NOT RATIONAL.

It READ like something a person would write to get a REACTION. Which it DID...

At first, I had a knee-jerk defensive reaction, too.. since he WAS sort of writing about ME.. in a rambling, abstract globalized nonsensical sort of way--

Of course, I think a lot of GUYS would have a "reaction" if I suggested we'd have a MUCH better world (less war, violence, & crime, etc.) if we picked out the few GOOD men an' put them in SPERM BANKS-

..then CASTRATE the rest an stick 'em in WORK CAMPS!

..Until the guys realized I was just MAKING THIS UP for the sake of MAKING a POINT!

Well, I ended up kinda feeling SORRY for Dave. It almost seemed he was BUILDING a WALL of WORDS between himself and most of the human race--

But, of course, this is what a LOT of people do. Everybody's got SOME place to hide. Look... Roberta's here behind this little "Roberta" icon..

Words and pictures are so.. "funny".. all these letters of the alphabet and scribbles with which we're trying to make SENSE out of this UNIVERSE.. and convey it to OTHERS.. then wonder why nobody understands us..

Maybe Dave's views would be easier for me to COMPREHEND if he'd delivered it like a "talking-head-Roberta" monologue-

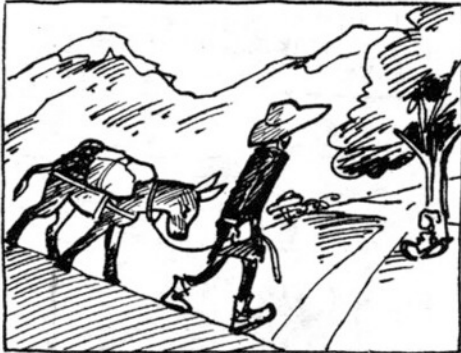
And, one of the "funniest" things to me is how we ALL live in the SAME WORLD-
..and ALL live in-
..SEPARATE WORLDS!
It's fascinated me no END!

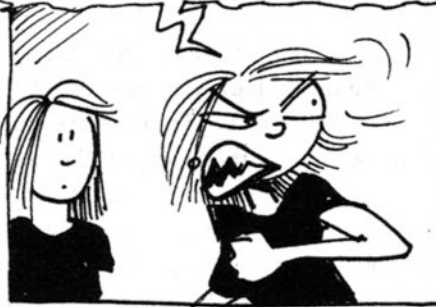
Depending on how someone grew up or how their family was, or EXPERIENCES during their "formative years," it's hard NOT to have a FILTER of PREJUDICES and preconceived notions to color our perceptions..

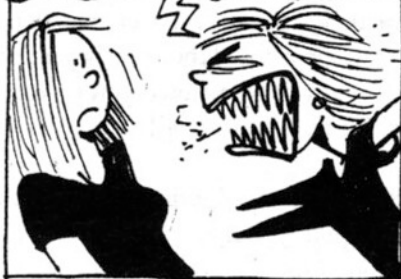
You're going to tend to "SEE" whatever it is that fits whatever you EXPECT!

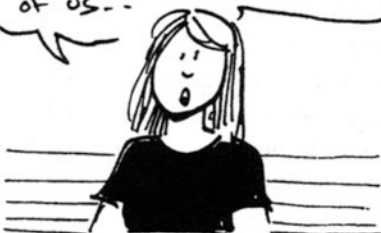
One person's going to look around and see a WONDERFUL WORLD.. And ANOTHER person will look at the SAME and see just the OPPOSITE!

Anyhow, let me take a break from all the GABBING and tell a STORY- I'm sure there are MANY VERSIONS of this one..

A traveler came to a CROSSROADS and saw an old woman sitting by the side of the road –

Some time later, the woman was met by ANOTHER traveler... coming from the same direction...

HEY! What am I DOING HERE? This is a COMIC BOOK belonging to that FUNNY ANIMAL CARTOONIST WHO **HATES WOMEN**!

HEY! YOU **JERKS** wouldn't even BE here unless some... WOMAN PUMPED you out of her BODY so.. QUIT YOUR WHINING..
Well... what I... THINK Dave believes is that "FEMINISTS" (whatever he means by that word) have HIJACKED WESTERN CIVILIZATION.
Don't I WISH..
FEMINISTS?
welcom to BUSH AMERIC

DON'T GET ME STARTED ON FEMINISTS! THEY'VE SCREWED THINGS UP FOR WOMEN MY ENTIRE ADULT LIFE!! FORCING WOMEN TO GO TO WORK..

EXPECTING MEN AND WOMEN TO ACTUALLY.. COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER..! IF IT WASN'T FOR THEM I'D HAVE LANDED A GUY DECADES AGO...
See? There's LOTS of people around who'd agree with that view..
Or a VERSION thereof..
If it weren't for FEMINISTS I'd have a NEW CAR! If it wasn't for THEM I'd be 20 pounds LIGHTER! If it wasn't for feminists..

Anyhow.. if someone's publishing their own Book they certainly have the right to say whatever they WANT in print..
ESPECIALLY if they seem kind of "out there" to some of us..

And, doesn't it say something about the RESPECT Dave has earned in the Industry that people DID make a big deal about what he wrote? If he was just some guy with a BLOG... WHO'D CARE?

And, as far as I KNOW, none of these dreaded "Feminists" have sued him for "hate-speak." So, THAT should make him HAPPY...
OR... DISAPPOINTED..
I dunno..
I'm sure there's art I wouldn't enjoy as much if I knew every detail of its creators PERSONAL POLITICS- Heck, there's some folks I DEFINITELY don't want to know too much about..

What REALLY matters is the CREATION itself! The RICH TAPESTRY we all live in and do our BEST to interpret with the UNIQUE GIFTS and TALENTS we're BLESSED with..
Sheesh..

Our GREAT WORKS which, with luck will survive our short lives here and live ON to ENRICH the
our common
Hey! SHE'S the one who says ALL MEN should be CASTRATED and put in WORK CAMPS..
THAT'S her..
That's **ALL**..

First Amendment Mind Games

Dave and Craig discuss the Muslim vs. Danish cartoonists controversy

Craig: *In February, riots and protests broke out in the Muslim world as they learned about a collection of anti-Muslim editorial cartoons that had appeared in a Denmark newspaper. Though many newspapers reporting on the protests failed to reproduce the cartoons about which they wrote, the cartoons were easily available online. On February 16, there were even reports that a Pakistani imam was offering $1 million for the death of "the cartoonist" (apparently he thought all the cartoons had been produced by one person). Regardless of the accuracy of this report—there was conflicting information in the days that followed—the entire affair seemed suspicious. (For instance, how did all of those Danish flags just happen to appear suddenly in Muslim countries in order to be burned during the protests? If I suddenly needed one to stage my own protest, I wouldn't know where to begin to go get one. They certainly aren't at the local Wal-Marts, where I have a hard enough time finding a Texas flag.) After all, the cartoons had originally been published months before, and were later reprinted in an Egyptian paper, both without controversy. I wondered if you had any thoughts on all this, considering that you are both a cartoonist and a Muslim.*

Dave: The bottom line on my view of the Danish cartoon controversy is that I would never draw a picture of Prophet Muhammad—or Abu Bakr or Omar or the Prophet's nephew or grandson or his wives—myself, because I'm aware that that's severely frowned upon in Islam, and I would think myself a bad Muslim if I did. At the same time, I would never actively stop anyone else from doing so or join a riot protesting someone who had done so. In my view, as it says in the Koran, you can't injure God, and I assume that you can't injure the memory of His last messenger and seal of prophets. The right things you do are to your own benefit, and the wrong things that you do are to your own detriment. If doing the cartoons or publishing the cartoons or reading the cartoons is sinful, you'll have to account for your participation on Judgment Day. If it's at the upper reaches of sin—*haram* or worse—then you have basically condemned your own soul to eternal suffering as a result.

Why take the risk?

And the answer, of course, in secular Western terms, is that there is no risk, because there is no God, no Judgment Day, and, ergo, no possible consequence. Whereas in Western terms of creative freedom as a non-negotiable absolute there is demonstrable harm—the thin end of the wedge—in sequestering any subject or individual from fair comment, criticism, and parody. If Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) gets a "bye," then what's next? You can't make fun of fundamentalist imams? You can't make fun of bin Laden? But I don't think that's actually a persuasive argument. No Muslims ever rioted because of cartoons about the Ayatollah Khomeini or Osama bin Laden or Yasser Arafat, but they do draw the line at God's prophets and messengers. And what was the point of the cartoons? It was really a critique of Islamic fundamentalism. If—instead of saying that they were depicting Muhammed—the cartoonists had labelled the character "Fundamentalist Islam" or "Wacky Islam," no one would have said "boo" about the guy's turban being drawn to look like a bomb. It would have just been an editorial cartoon. By saying, "We are drawing Muhammed here," the cartoonists were intentionally attempting to provoke a scrap to no good purpose that I could see. I'd be surprised if any of them could cite five known facts about the Prophet, so how could they say they were "doing" him? They just drew a stereotypical Arab and labelled him Muhammed in order to irritate Muslims.

The definition of *jihad* is fighting on the path of God: that is, aligning yourself with God and doing what you think God would want you to do. A vast number of Muslims believe that it would be a sin of omission to allow infidels to insult the Prophet with impunity—that their own soul would be at stake as a result and that further, knowingly insulting the Prophet with no motive apart from insulting the Prophet (and I think it would be hard to argue that any larger purpose has been served from insulting the Prophet unless you can think of one) is a demonstration that the West is capable—and intent upon—eroding all standards down to their own. We allow abominations like Piss Christ to exist and think nothing of it, so we want to do the same thing to Muhammed as a way of demonstrating our ethical superiority. You can read that sentence as many times as you like; it's still going to come up pretty screwy as far as rational thought goes. I can understand reading biographies of the Prophet or the sayings of the Prophet (the Hadith) or the Koran itself and disagreeing with the content or debating motives and decisions or interpretations as a pure expression of Western-style freedom of expression. I do myself, although I don't know any Muslims that I could discuss them with. But just arbitrarily doing something to insult Prophet Muhammed's memory that can't lead to any positive outcome just seems needlessly destructive and provocative. I would strongly advocate that people don't do that in the same way that I would strongly advocate that women leave the workforce and be-

come good wives and mothers. I strongly advocate and then brace myself for the consequences because I don't think, at least in the short term, my advocacy is going to do any good in either case.

Craig: *Okay, but I think there may be some aspects of the situation that allow for some complications.*

On one hand, cartoonists—at least in America—have often complained that they are not taken seriously. Sure it's mostly comic book artists who voice this complaint. And yes, they're not alone—it's a complaint heard by many in the art community—actors, for instance. But trying to stay on the specific topic here without having the discussion fly off in all directions: on one hand I look at this situation and think, "Okay, cartoonists, you're purposefully poking a stick in the eye of Muslims, and some of them are taking you seriously. Be careful what you wish for, as the cliché goes."

On the other hand, I can't help but wonder—and I'm not the only one who has expressed this view—whether a lot of this is a contrived controversy created by a few individuals who may stand to benefit from fanning the flames of riotous behavior. When the cartoons originally appeared back in September in Denmark, then later in October on the front page of an Egyptian newspaper, nothing much happened, so, according to William Kristol writing in The Weekly Standard, *"a group of Danish imams took off for the Middle East to try to cause trouble....The militants' trip was a success" (February 20).*

I also wonder whether the rioters are actually offended or just using this as an excuse to protest against the West. (This is not a rhetorical question on my part. I actually do wonder, unlike many—if not most—of the U.S. protests about everything under the sun, in which I assume there's a high degree of insincerity. One of my favorite George Will phrases is the "indignation industry," in which certain groups or individuals are constantly running around being "offended" or, even better, "highly offended," at all sorts of things. Bill Maher—at the opposite end of the political spectrum as Will—years ago on Politically Incorrect *said that he didn't believe all of these "offended" people were really offended; they were just claiming to be offended in order to score political points.)*

So I find myself in the awkward position (awkward, but not, unfortunately, unusual) of finding both sides at fault. The cartoons are disrespectful and needlessly provocative, especially at a time like this. And First Amendment tolerance is, after all, a Western political concept, not one of the Ten Commandments (or, I would assume, a foundational principle of the Koran, though I'm not the expert in that area). Yet public calls for lynchings—regardless of the offense of the individual—go beyond the bounds of expression of civilized faith.

But what is the appropriate response? You write, "We allow abominations like Piss Christ to exist and think nothing of it...." Actually, Piss Christ created all kinds of controversy, and it broke down into two categories, if I remember correctly: those who thought it shouldn't exist at all, and those who thought it should not have received any sort of public funding through the National Endowment for the Arts (either the work itself, or its exhibition, or whatever). These, I would argue, are complicated questions, because they involve the inter-relation of two separate (and massive) spheres—religion and politics. More specifically: what should be the responsibility of the believer in a democratic society that seeks to grant, as much as practically possible, equal rights to the practitioners of all faiths?

It's a question I've pondered for twenty-some years and have yet to figure out the ideal answer.

Dave: Working backward through your points:

Piss Christ created a controversy but ultimately prevailed over all opposition and—at a half-step remove through the National Endowment for the Arts—established that "We, the People of the United States of America, through our government, endorse this as a legitimate viewpoint." From an Islamic standpoint, that certainly would indicate that the United States has capitulated to God's adversary and turned its collective back on God by first countenancing and then endorsing such an extreme and indefensible expression whose only point is the extreme and indefensible expression itself (what else is it saying? What else could it be saying?). There is a "last bastion" quality that kicks in. Christendom is really down to parts of the southern United States and the Catholic Church's presence in Africa and the Third World. These are the only places where orthodox Christianity still prevails. Everywhere else it is a quaint artifact tottering at the periphery of the triumph of secularism or a mealy-mouthed social welfare agency with no ethical standpoint to speak of. If Muslims don't take a stand on behalf of God, who will?

I would strongly advocate that the "artist" take the crucifix out of the jar of his urine, wash it off, give it to a local church, flush his urine as he should have in the first place, clean the jar, and apologize for being a pinhead and an idiot. I don't think it will do much good, but that's what I advocate.

In *realpolitik* terms, I suspect that this has more to do with the fact that Iran is imminently facing sanctions by the U.N. Security Council for its nuclear program and that Denmark's turn in a supervisory capacity at the U.N. is coming up right around the time that the issue is going to be addressed. The Muslim extremist nations are laying the groundwork, I suspect, to intimidate Denmark in advance, to ensure solidarity among the overall Muslim block of nations, and to see what sort of underdog status they can attain in the eyes of the Western fence-sitting, knee-jerk Marxist-feminists who dominate the E.U., the U.S.State Department, and the U.N., and how much they can turn that into votes in favour of Iran and against the United States (by framing the discussion in exactly those turns. "Oh, it's just Denmark persecuting the poor Muslims again. Denmark's just a U.S. puppet, and this is their Guantanamo Bay, this is their Abu Ghraib prison."). Presumably most of Latin America—which has adopted an extreme leftist anti-U.S. position as the sum of the region's foreign policy—will be voting with Iran.

And yes, a lot of it is contrived vested self-interest. I'm consistently astonished at the extent

to which fundamentalist Islam resembles Marxist-feminism in that way: as you wrote about Bill Maher's observation that these people aren't actually offended, they're just tactically offended in order to gain the upper hand politically. It removes the political dispute from the center of the table and moves your hurt feelings into its place, and as long as we're dealing with your hurt feelings, then we don't get to discuss the merits of your argument, and as long as we don't get to discuss the merits of your argument and are having to be mindful of your hurt feelings, you get to change the direction of society on the basis of unfounded and indefensible suppositions, and if we try to stop you from doing so, we're accused of being bigots.

It's also, I think, worth pointing out that Islam is going through its societal adolescence. Fourteen hundred years into Christianity the same thing was going on. Universally, Christians went to church not just to worship God, but to be told by the minister or priest how to think, how to vote, what to support, and what to oppose locally and nationally. That was the groundswell of grass roots "thinking" that led to the Crusades. Just look at the countries where Denmark has decided to close its diplomatic missions—Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Indonesia, and now Pakistan. These are places where part of Friday prayers involves pouring out into the streets and demonstrating or burning Danish flags or burning the Danish embassy or burning down McDonald's or KFC if the imam tells you that that's what you should do as a good Muslim. Is that groundswell of grass roots support cynically made use of by the Muslim tyrants in those countries? Sure, as the groundswell of grass roots support was cynically made use of by the Pope and the tyrannical crowned heads of Europe in the Middle Ages. Does that mean it isn't sincere? On the contrary. You could argue that in the fourteen hundreds, there was no more universally held and sincere a Christian view than the belief that Christendom's most sacred sites were in the hands of the descendants and followers of the Antichrist, Muhammed.

And, here in its adolescence, Islam has an advantage that Christianity didn't have in its adolescence in that Islam can see—by looking at what's happened to Christianity—where incremental capitulation to secularism gets you. Each minor capitulation is small in itself, but you do end up with really abhorrent end results in the eyes of people the focus of whose life is praying five times a day. The non-Muslim world is wallowing in its own filth—in the case of Piss Christ, literally. There is a certain clarity in seeing that McDonald's and KFC are not exactly innocent in that context. You're far better off eating fresh fruits and vegetables, humus and pita bread, than you are giant gobs of deep-fried fat. To attach a radiant mystique to giant gobs of deep-fried fat and to make them seem preferable to traditional Muslim and Arabic foods purely through marketing, packaging, and good ol' North American Razzle Dazzle seems very much of a piece with the core problem—incremental capitulation to secularism and where it leads. I eat at McDonald's once a week myself, so I'm indicting myself as well. I strongly advocate not doing so. I strongly advocate throwing your television away, but there my advocacy has greater weight, because I threw my own television away. In both cases, I assume that my advocacy is close to 100% futile. People are not going to stop eating at McDonald's. People are not going to throw their televisions away. But, if even three people do, then in my view the world has been improved as a result.

And looking at the bright side, the cartoon controversy has caused a schism between the fence-sitters and the First Amendment absolutists, the former essentially saying to the latter, "You're not helping matters." And the First Amendment absolutists, by responding, "The point isn't to help matters, the point is absolute freedom of the press at any costs!" establish that they, likewise, are ideological extremists like the fundamentalist Muslims. "It is critically important that these cartoons get printed universally, even if that means that half the world has to go up in flames." And the logical question implied is, "Why?" It's the thin end of many wedges. If the First Amendment absolutists prevail, it's the beginning of the end of the last outpost of sacrosanct and unassailable regard for God and His prophets. If the fence-sitters prevail, it's the beginning of the end of First Amendment absolutism. One or the other has to take place, which means it's also the beginning of the end of fence-sitting. What a magnificent and, to me, divinely-inspired construct. Allahu Akhbar! God is Great!

As for the cartoonists and artists in general, we come again to inmost motivation. If the reason you were attracted to editorial cartooning is because you like to strip an issue down to its component elements and show them in a single image which clarifies the debate, I don't think you would see a need to do a cartoon of Prophet Muhammed. You can make your point without doing so. If, on the other hand, your actual motivation as a political cartoonist is just to incite your audience and to stir up and inflame negative emotions, then it's a good example of getting the tiger by the tail: you almost have to do a cartoon with Muhammed in it to prove your own *bona fides*. Anything else makes you a secular First Amendment absolutist hypocrite.

In fact, the challenge is there before brave artists everywhere. Fill a jar with urine and drop a Koran into it and call it Piss Koran and then publicize the hell out of it.

I mean, why not?

Why not, indeed.

Craig: *I think you've covered things well, so I would just add:*

Not living in Denmark or knowing any of the cartoonists personally, I can't say for sure, but from afar it certainly appears that the cartoons fall into the category of "out-

rageous art done just for the sake of being outrageous." (I will quote, as evidence, another line from Kristol's Weekly Standard *piece: "The newspaper was testing freedom of speech in Denmark, and challenging the 'self-censorship which rules large parts of the Western world.'") While I can see value in such a challenge,* per se, *I can't get past the impression that the cartoons' real agenda was furthering not a political ideology, but an artistic one: art that infuriates has inherent value.*

I debate this with an artist friend of mine, and neither of us has been able to convince the other so far. My point is that art done just to infuriate not only has no inherent value, but also takes little or no talent, especially in this day and age when the "indignation industry" is in full bloom. But that aside, my friend thinks it's great when artists "stick it to" conservative or religious groups, or President Bush, because, y'know, "They're morons, and they deserve it." I respond that it's just as easy to infuriate the ACLU or PETA or whatever liberal group you may choose. And where does that leave artists? In a morally and spiritually debased downward spiral that will further corrupt the culture.

The response will often come, "So you want every TV show to be like Touched by an Angel *and every comic strip to have the edginess of* Garfield.*" Of course, this is ridiculous. Virtually all of my favorite works are what most people would consider "dark and depressing." But they work within their own worlds and aren't trying to lecture me from their own perceived moral and intellectual superiority about how stupid they think I am.*

I should add that I think there is a legitimate place for artists to challenge the culture and people's ideologies. And I think it's clear when this is going on. To pick an obvious example that almost everyone will be familiar with, Alan Moore's left-of-center politics is a foundation of Watchmen, *but he's engaging the issues intellectually. Andres Serrano ain't no Alan Moore, and, as far as I can tell, neither are the Danish cartoonists.*

Dave: I think it's also worth noting that this all happened in the aftermath of the Theo Van Gogh getting stabbed to death by a fundamentalist Muslim which resulted from the movie he had made—with what he considered by be "sexist" verses from the Koran projected onto a woman's nude body—which he collaborated on with an apostate Muslim woman. It seems to me that it's just the wrong way to engage Islam unless you think martyrdom for filmmakers is ultimately going to give you some tactical advantage or bring about some sort of worldwide epiphany.

Contrast that with the apostate Canadian Muslim Lesbian (now there's a description for you) who went and interviewed fundamentalist imams who maintained that the Koran sanctions martyrdom when fighting on the path of God—essentially sanctions suicide bombing. And she says to them, "Where? Where in the Koran does it say that?" And they said, basically, throughout the Koran, it's repeated many times. "Just give me one example," she says. And they go and get the Koran and move off to one side and confer with each other for an extended period and come back with a quote from *The Spoils (Sura 8)* that is at best (at best!) tangentially applicable. No, virtually all of the references to martyrdom as a glorious and divinely-approved-of choice are from the earliest biographies of the Prophet or the Hadith, the saying of the Prophet, neither of which is scriptural, that is, universally acknowledged to be divinely inspired.

That sort of engagement—"Let's stick to scripture and discuss what God has actually told Muslims to do"—to me, moves the discussion forward. Projecting Koranic verses onto a woman's nude body and then distributing a movie of it is just an incite-

Hear Dave Sim read Genesis and Exodus! All Cerebus *fans are invited!*

ment to violence. It's disingenuous to think otherwise. But, it's like a two-year-old with a fork and an electrical outlet. "I want to do a children's book about the life of the Prophet Muhammed, and I can't find anyone willing to draw pictures of him." Instead of just saying, "Well, there's probably a good reason for that, so maybe I'll just do something else," there's just the "I can do whatever I want because not letting me do whatever I want is bigotry" attitude which leads to "Let's solicit a bunch of cartoonists to do cartoons about Muhammed," i.e. Let's stick the fork in the electrical outlet and see what happens."

AAAAAGGGHHH!

Well, there you go. Next time, don't be so stupid.

2005 Day Prize: The Lone and Level Sands

by A. David Lewis, mpMann, & Jennifer Rodgers

Caption Box/www.captionbox.net

I really couldn't disagree more with A. David Lewis' perspective on Exodus and the Koran. It seems to me that all attempts to diminish the divinely-inspired to the merely human and to submit one's self to the perennial seduction of Egypt's poisonous trappings, whether in ancient days or in the twenty-first century, well...it would be hard to imagine anyone who would rather—having experienced both firsthand—be ruled by twenty-first century Cairo than any twenty-first century democracy. Still, the protection of multiplicity of viewpoints is the core of what we are and the core of what we are fighting to advance, to entrench, and to maintain around the world in the face of the contrary impulse which has always found a home in Egypt. And that advancement, entrenchment, and maintenance has to include what I personally see as misguided and unfounded romanticism if it is to have any meaning whatsoever.

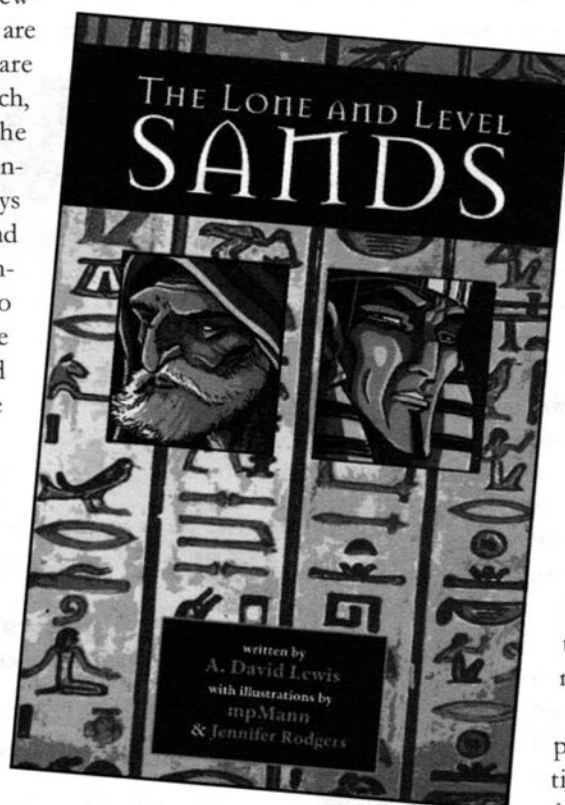
Although I am mostly Muslim and have been since 1999, I cannot share the viewpoint of Muslims which we have seen exhibited so dramatically in recent months that the pictorial portrayal of God's prophets and messengers is something that should be forbidden. It can be cautioned against and in my own case, it is an untenable creative decision for me, personally, but that is a very different thing from compulsion, for or against. Likewise it would seem anathema to the history of the democratic impulse and the protection of the right of free speech for me as the composer of the Short List for the Day Prize this year to either refuse to read a book like *The Lone and Level Sands* because it is a retelling of the story of Moses and Aaron from what its author believes to be Pharaoh's side or to dismiss the book itself with its gorgeous front and back covers and its spare graphic style, the work of artist mpMann, which neatly complements its austere treatment of its subject, a graphic novel that, in the words of its back cover copy, "tells the story of a man trying to rule wisely, love his family well, and deal justly in the face of a divine wrath."

There is always the danger that, as a fully liberalized Westerner, I might have been erring on the side of overcompensation, nominating an inferior work as a means of demonstrating that I'm not prejudiced against it.

The fact that *The Lone and Level Sands* was unquestionably Gerhard's first choice in his capacity as the selector of the Day Prize recipient for 2005 would seem to indicate to me, and I hope to all of you and most particularly to A. David Lewis and mpMann, that that was very much not the case.

And so I'm pleased that, in addition to saluting this thought-provoking and carefully crafted work, that we are also acknowledging the genuine "lone and level sands" in our democratic society which will always favour the protected free speech of everyone, regardless of personal belief and personal preference.

Please join us in welcoming to the stage A. David Lewis and mpMann, the creators of the 2005 Day Prize recipient, *The Lone and Level Sands*.

—Dave Sim

Your Guide to "Misunderstanding Comix"

The Misfiring of a Mind Game

By Dave Sim

It had basically begun as my latest attempt to figure out how to do comic books "live", a quest that dated back as far as the early 90s when Larry Marder, Jeff Smith, Martin Wagner and I were discussing a "Beans, Bones, Hepcats & an Aardvark" Tour of shopping malls to try to attract civilian attention to our works. Discussions didn't get very far, but the idea remained an intriguing one for me. A major component, I thought, needed to be "watching us draw"—and not just sketches with markers and ballpoint pens which are the norm at signings but watching us use the actual materials that we use to draw a finished page. Coincidentally on a day when I had been thinking about this, Harry Kremer had phoned from Now & Then Books to ask if I had any ideas for the store's 29th Anniversary Party (which events were always, inexplicably, sparsely attended). Basically I decided to kill two birds with one stone by getting Harry to invite Chester, Seth and Joe Matt (having taken to visiting them in Toronto starting in the fall of 1998) to be the guests and advertising that fact on the inside front cover of *Cerebus*—Canada's three best-known comic-book creators *and* Dave Sim and Gerhard: how could it miss? And also, I decided to do a test-run on my "watch them draw" idea incorporating Joe Matt's *"Jam" Sketchbook* concept....

[Since February of 1995 Joe had been carrying around a sketchbook with pre-drawn panel borders that he would get cartoonists to do alternating panels in, i.e. Joe would do the first panel, Seth would do the second panel, Chet would do the third panel, whoever was around at the signing or convention would do the next panel (among the illustrious guest stars: Will Eisner, Gilbert Shelton, Bernie Mireault, Adrian Tomine, Julie Doucet, Jay Stephens) and then back to the first guy until the page had been filled. Ultimately, Chet and Seth had had enough with the Jam Sketchbook and flat-out refused to do any more no matter how hard Joe whined at them. He got me and Jason Lutes to do one at an open house for Robert Myre's Big Picture Distribution Company. All I had with me were ballpoint pens, which is something I always hate about doing jam pieces at conventions and signings—I don't have my actual materials with me. As I say, two birds with one stone.]

Two nights before the signing, we loaded up Gerhard's old drawing board, chair, table, electric pencil sharpener and lamp into a United Taxi van and transported them across downtown to Now & Then Books. John Balge, Harry, Bill Fraser and others consulted and made suggestions as we rearranged the side alcove, setting up space for four signers at any given point and the drawing board where someone would be working on a finished panel when it was his turn.

Having already pre-lettered the "Misunderstanding Comix" title onto a full-sized sheet of illustration board, I then took that down to Now & Then late on Friday afternoon along with a tracing of a photograph of a Victorian gentleman in the hatch of a Civil War era submarine.

[the gag—which I had notified the participants about by phone—was a light-hearted swipe at Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* which, it seemed to me, frequently veered between general observations on the medium itself and Scott's own comic-book preferences and choices. We would just flat-out declare our way to be the only right way to do "comix" in alternating panels]

Harry and I chatted amiably about the signing as I shifted things around, taped the tracing paper into the right position and sharpened my No.4 pencil. As soon as my pencil touched the tracing paper, Harry said, "Well, I'll leave you to it." And walked away.

It certainly hadn't taken long to find the potential fly in the ointment. About forty minutes later a female customer came up. "Could I get you to sign this *Cerebus* for my boyfriend?" I said, sure, and signed the book and did a head sketch. "Thanks," she said and then added, "Sorry to bother you while you're working."

The problem which should have been obvious to me and hadn't been is that a comic-book artist sitting at an actual drawing board with all of his materials is obviously *working* and doing a job that actually requires a specialized environment and tools. Customers came and went on that (as usual) busy Friday night and all of them carefully gave the drawing board area a wide berth, speaking in whispers and avoiding looking in my direction.

The same proved true on signing day. At the still sparsely attended—but *less* sparsely attended than usual—event all of the attendees clustered around the autograph tables. After I had finished my panel it was Chester's turn. Chester went over to the drawing board and, so far as the attendees were concerned, vanished off the face of the earth. When he was done, he returned to reality and it was Seth's turn to vanish off the face of the earth.

And when they were done, the only person who went over to see what they had done was me. Not only was someone obviously working a situation to be avoided, it was considered rude to look at the results of that work. It seemed too private a thing to peek at!

I tried to connect the two areas of the signing by heckling Joe when it became his turn-to no avail. In fact all I managed to do was to irritate Joe, forgetting that when Joe is irritated he tends to go into

(continued on page 22)

MISUNDER-
STANDING
COMIX

TRACE EVERYTHING FROM PHOTOGRAPHS. ALL OF YER COMIC GREATS TRACE FROM PHOTOGRAPHS...
YER ALEX RAYMOND.
YER STAN DRAKE.
YER NEAL ADAMS.
YER AL WILLIAMSON.
YER LEONARD STARR

YES, YES -- LIKE HAROLD GRAY.
WHAT ?! HAROLD GRAY !

Yes-- comics must be simpler in style... cleaner, bolder!
Sure, I get ya... like John Stanley.
NO GIRLS ALLOWED
NEW BACK-GROUND

IN FACT, NOBODY TRACED PHOTOGRAPHS BETTER THAN JOHN STANLEY. HE HAD HIS OWN UNIQUE TECHNIQUE OF TRACING WITH NOTHING OTHER THAN HIS OWN
SH
SH
PAPER.

Leapin' Louie!
SH!
IT'S THE GHOST OF JOHN STANLEY (OR HAROLD GRAY OR SOMEONE) IF EVERYONE WILL JUST SHUT UP MAYBE WE CAN HEAR WHAT HE'S SAYING!
YOU MUST DRAW ...EVERYONE... WITH... TINY... LITTLE ... HEADS...
AND... GREAT ...BIG... HANDS
JOHN STANLEY OR HAROLD GRAY OR SOMEONE
BORN 1894 DIED 1968

YOU'RE RIGHT -- JOHN STANLEY WAS BRILLIANT. IN FACT I JUST HAPPEN TO HAVE ONE OF HIS ORIGINALS HERE.
AND... BLANK... EYES... LONG... LEGS... AND...

IT'S GORGEOUS -- SIMPLE, CLEAN, BOLD, AND TRACED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS. I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY STANLEY'S ORIGINALS ARE SO INEXPENSIVE.

SUSHI ON BLOOR ... 22 JANUARY 2003
SO HERE'S TO HAROLD GRAY!
AND JOHN STANLEY!
AND VIDEO PORN!
MEANWHILE, THE NON-PHOTO-REALISTIC DAVE SIM OF EARTH-TWO PLOTS HIS REVENGE!
GRR.
The End

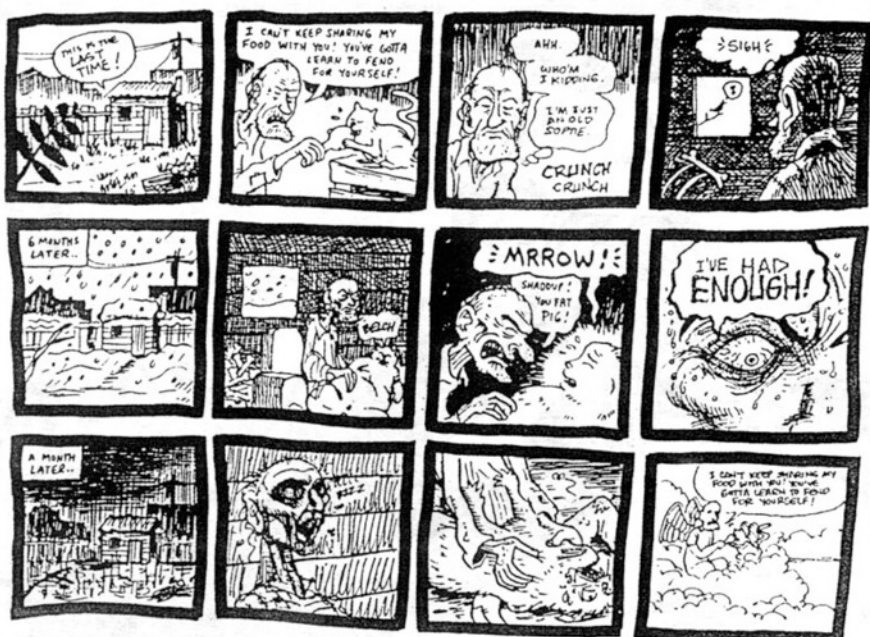
(continued from page 19)
full-bore scatological mode which he then proceeded to do. I had also not taken into account how long it takes to do finished artwork and we had only half-filled the page by the time the signing was over.

I did keep the piece hanging on my studio wall and would look at it from time-to-time, wondering what to with the next panel. Seth was living in Guelph and Joe was at his most unproductive, so I figured Chet and I would do the rest of it. I'm really not a censorious person by nature, but Joe's dialogue balloon definitely bugged me, so I basically censored his last line by lettering over it while still leaving it visible enough to read if you really wanted to and made that a segue into a Harold Gray "Little Orphan Annie" Sunday page splash panel parody (Chet hadn't had the chance to actually *do* Harold Gray, so I pencilled the panel and lettered it and then gave it to him to ink-I'm always giving him a hard time about Harold Gray's proclivity for drawing little tiny heads and great big hands).

Chet did the next two panels on his own, incorporating an actual Neal Adams page from an issue of *Batman* in panel 7. Surely the only time you'll ever see a Chester Brown Neal Adams homage!

I finished it off with an image traced from the photo accompanying the *National Post's* story about Seth and Chester and Joe's farewell lunch at Sushi On Bloor in January of 2003 (I told you they're Canada's most famous comic-book creators!) just before Joe moved to the States to be with his new girlfriend.

Chester Brown on "Misunderstanding Comix"

Dave writes that he notified Seth, Joe, and me by phone that we'd be doing this jam-strip. I did remember him saying *something* about a jam beforehand but, if he explained the performance/on-display aspect, I hadn't retained that information and was surprised by Dave's plan on the day of the signing. In every other respect, Dave's report accords with my memory of the event. When I was at the drawing board, I definitely felt like I was away from the fun part of the room—the autograph tables. (Maybe I'm perverse, but I always find it fun to watch Seth and Dave interact.) The strip got fun for me when I was able to do my panels at home. Inking the Daddy Warbucks drawing was particularly enjoyable. The Neal Adams page that I redrew in miniature comes from page 12 of "Moon of the Wolf" —the cover story for *Batman* #255 (April, 1974) which I bought back when I was 13.

Seth on "Misunderstanding Comix"

It is shocking how poor my memory is becoming. I don't remember anything about that jam strip you sent along. If you hadn't sent it, I would never have remembered it in the rest of my life. That said, your account of things seems perfectly reasonable. I have no objections—and with the abovementioned memory lapse—I obviously have no additions.

Joe Matt on "Misunderstanding Comix"

It's great to see the jam strip finally finished, even if ultimately it is far from successful. My thoughts on the strip, and jam strips, in general are as follows, and you may quote me or refer to these comments any way you see fit (or not!!)

First, I must've drawn jam strips with over fifty different people (back in the late 1990s when I was really into it), and ultimately only one person was capable of producing halfway decent results, and that was Chester. No one else cared enough to even try to do a decent strip. For example, take the strip we did with Chester and Seth. You'll notice Chester's second panel is very *logical*—he's maintained the same shot and style, visually, but look at his decisions as a writer. Who is the man in the hat addressing? Someone above him and off-cam-

Joe Matt got Dave Sim and Jason Lutes to do a jam comic at an open house for Robert Myre's Big Picture Distribution Company.

era, obviously. You'd be amazed at how many people would follow this panel with something totally unrelated. Mort Walker would probably draw Beetle Bailey standing in line in a cafeteria, and you'd be lucky if he continued the train of thought involving comics and tracing from photographs.

Chester has always understood that jam strips are a *collaboration,* much like musicians jamming. A *key* has been established visually, and a *melody* has been introduced thematically. When it's your turn to "play," you can't be a hog or a show-off. You can't force or control the strip by trying to cram too much into your panel. Nor can you contribute nothing by just stalling for time with an uneventful panel. Chester once demonstrated this to me by covering up *every other panel* in a 20-panel jam strip that I had done with a young woman. The strip, consisting of just my ten panels, read identically—proving how ineffectual and disposable her panels were. She had simply refused or was unable to make any decision in "steering" the strip. Anyway, it was a real eye-opener to me regarding the nature of jam strips.

So back to Chester's second panel. He chose to have the off-camera character respond to the man's comments in the first panel. And he chose a very *incongruous* response by having this character mention Harold Gray, a cartoonist whose style is anything but photographic. And, of course, the man in the hat's reaction is utter surprise, logically.

Also notice that Chester didn't get greedy. He didn't bite off too much by *showing* this off-camera character. But by giving it a word balloon, he hands the opportunity of showing this character to the cartoonist who will draw the next panel. And therein lies the fun of jam strips—getting the page back with an unexpected surprise and having to continue with it. And the challenge is always to make it work, to have it go somewhere, and hopefully to resolution, but not predictable resolution. It's a nigh-impossible task, and all the more so if no one is trying!

And speaking of not trying, let's examine Seth's third panel. And keep in mind—Seth *hated* doing jam strips. I pestered him so much to do them that ultimately he just refused. And the only reason he agreed to draw in this strip was because someone other than me (namely *you*, Dave) was pestering him to do it. So his panel was done in two seconds without a second thought as to what preceded it. He commits every possible error: 1) the style changes immensely; 2) the background changes; 3) the man in the hat is no longer surprised—in fact; he's inexplicably *agreeing* with the off-camera character; 4) the opportunity to *show* the off-camera character is not seized; and 5) now the man in the hat is adding *John Stanley* to the list of photo-realist cartoonists, and it makes absolutely *no sense!*

So, by the time I get called on to do the fourth panel, the strip's already ruined. If it were a video game, I would've pressed "restart." As it was, I did my best to bring back the older style and continue the ridiculous inclusion of John Stanley by absurdly implying that he traced onto shit-smeared toilet paper. My approach was still logical, while simultaneously expressing my disgust over this now-ruined strip.

What's even more absurd, though, is to analyze this awful strip so closely. It gets progressively more convoluted, panel by panel, ending with the in-joke of what we, the cartoonists, look like and the even *further* in-joke that one of us (me) likes video porn. Ugh. What a mess! And then in the final caption box—a reference to "Earth-Two"!! Ugh. I'd be ashamed to show this strip to the man on the street.

Anyway, I stopped bugging people to do jam strips with me for this very reason. People suck, and nobody wants to try very hard. Chester was the only one, and I bugged him so much that he eventually turned on me, too.

By the way, I recently re-read Chester's *Ed the Happy Clown* and it was crystal clear that it was basically Chester doing an extended jam strip with himself. He's even admitted to throwing *completely random elements* into the story whenever he felt stuck. He said he would just go over to his bookshelf, open up a random book, and somehow incorporate the material into his storyline.

So here's to Chester—King of the Jam Strip! Not that his ego needs further stroking.

Also, by the way, my mini-comic collection of jam strips is long out-of-print. Drawn & Quarterly will hopefully publish a nice edition of it someday, but it still needs filling out. There're so many mediocre strips in it. I keep hoping to get Dan Clowes or Chris Ware or *somebody* with some goddamn talent to draw some new strips with me, but I'm sadly "out of the loop" at the present moment. Besides, even if I could get some talented cartoonists to jam with me, that's still no guarantee of a successful jam strip. In many ways it's an unattainable goal.

Mind Games of the Avant Garde
Chester Brown and Dave Sim "have at it"

Howdy, folks. Dave Sim here commandeering the letters page this issue. Please remain calm. The following arrived inside of my 2005 Christmas card from Chester Brown:

Hey Dave,

I just got Following Cerebus *#6 last week. Regarding our conversation about whether or not you should have phoned Art Spiegelman (p. 30): I don't think the Dave-Sim-the-Evil-Misogynist-Pariah-factor would be relevant in Art Spiegelman's case—I doubt his impression of your work has changed over the years. He probably had no interest in or respect for* Cerebus *before issue 186. After 186, if he even noticed the whole Dave-Sim-is-a-misogynist topic at all, he probably wondered what the big fuss was about and why people cared what your opinions on women were. If you had phoned him, I'd guess his mental reaction would not have been, "Oh no, it's that evil misogynist." I think it would have been, "Oh no, it's the guy who did that terrible comic." It was the same with Chris Ware—the reason he didn't call you back is because he doesn't think you're a talented cartoonist. If you had expressed the exact same "misogynistic" ideas but drew a very different comic—one that Chris loved—he'd have called you back.*

Enjoyed the issue —
Merry Christmas!
Chester

Thanks, Chet. It was great to see you again on one of my always-infrequent-in-winter visits to T.O. Thanks as well for your kind permission to print and reply to your note here.

I really thought I covered the possibility you suggest relative to Art Spiegelman when I said to Craig Thompson, "I'm not sure that Art Spiegelman would have any awareness of me as someone remotely near his Big League Avant Garde status..." but I should probably have clarified that a little more. It is one of the things that I've always found odd about The List...

Chester Brown's cover for Penguin Books

(Just to bring everyone else up to speed, when Chet and I were en route to the Beguiling after having had lunch with Rob Walton and James Turner, we were discussing a recent plum assignment that Chet had landed with Penguin Books: doing a comic-strip/cartoon illustration cover for a literary classic—in his case D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover.* I had asked-more than a little disingenuously-who else had been asked to do one of these covers? "Let me see," he said, "Art Spiegelman did one, Dan Clowes, Charles Burns, Seth, Chris Ware...."

"The usual suspects," I said.

Chet smiled and allowed—I suspect more than a little disingenuously—that it did *seem* to be the same group of cartoonists that kept turning up in these high-prestige real-world environments. Indulging in a little good-natured teasing from the sidelines, I asked, What had happened to the Brothers Hernandez? How did they get dropped from The List? Chet didn't know. Hard to tell if he was being serious or answering in the same facetious manner—as is always the case until one or the other of us cracks up. They hadn't been in that special issue of *McSweeny's* had they? Mmm. Chet was pretty sure they *had* been. As I say, good-natured teasing. Of course then we got to the Beguiling, and Chet pulled out a copy of *McSweeny's,* and there they were: Jaime and Gilbert. Okay, I thought, time for some more

good-natured teasing. What about Adrian Tomine? Why wasn't he on The List? Adrian—or Mr. Tomine if he prefers—was on my mind because I had just picked up the latest issue of *Optic Nerve.*

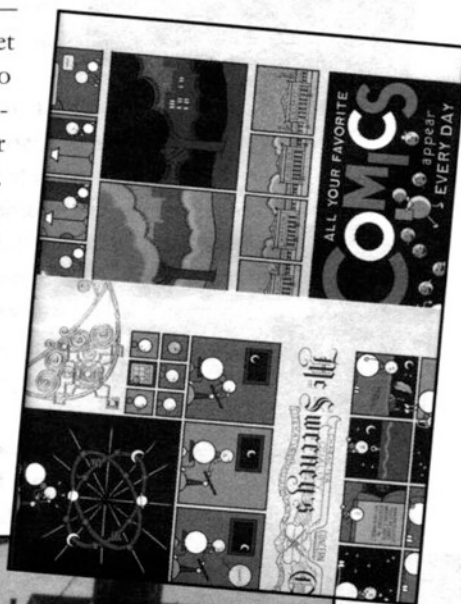
"Oh, Adrian is *definitely* on The List," said Chet.

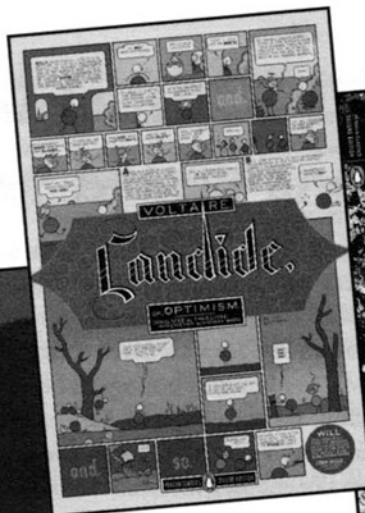
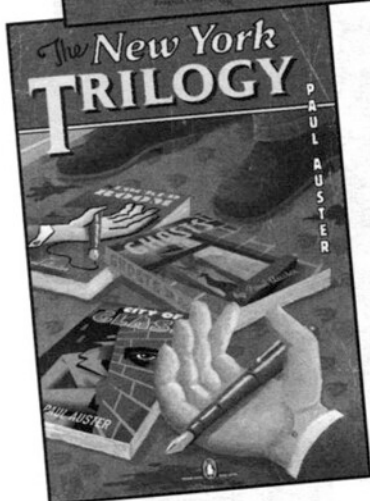
Yeah? How so? I asked—preparing to be needlessly quarrelsome—which is always a big part of our discussions when I visit Chet: whether the subject is comic books, Scripture, prostitution, or gloves vs. mittens.

"Adrian *passed* on doing the *Lady Chatterly's Lover*—that's why it was offered to *me*."

I cracked up. Okay, Chet won that round hands down.)

...what bothers me about The List is the sense of More Validity Than Thou that seems to accompany membership on it for several of its members. It seems to me that the latest round got launched with the *New York Times Magazine*—can you cite the date?—cover that you had done and the picture of you with Art Spiegelman, Chris Ware, Seth, Dan Clowes and…am I missing anyone?...and the accompanying article last summer. Nice Big Feathers in everyone's caps all the way around, to be sure, for whatever actual value this "real world" coverage has. But I really thought we had all gotten past that back in the 1980s when the Major Piece on Frank Miller in *Rolling Stone* really didn't do anything much for Frank that Frank...and DC...hadn't done for himself and when Alan Moore became a Top of the Pops pop culture phenom in England that left him, at the end of the day, merely, you know, Alan Moore. Not that there's anything *wrong* with that stature. I should be so lucky. Which is kind of my point.

By the way, feel free to lob accusations of "sour grapes" at me since I've been limited, personally, to one-off hit-and-run appearances in the second string environments like *The Onion* and *The Believer* [see last issue's "Who Reviews the Reviewers?]. I haven't been written about in *Rolling Stone, The Atlantic, The Village Voice* or Canada's major dailies since it became pretty obvious that I could no longer pass for a Marxist-feminist but, again, I don't remember ever selling an extra copy of *Cerebus* as a result. By the same "sour grapes" token, however, I would counter that I'm entering my fifties with a 6,000-page graphic novel to my credit while no one on The List has produced any graphic novel longer than a couple of hundred pages and that I think "sour grapes" tends to cut rather harder on The List's side than on my side if you take it as a given—as I do—that you can only get so much content into any given comic-book page no matter how you construct it. Truth to tell, I always thought that this was more than a little the professional motivation to "wipe Dave out" when issue 186 hit. If Dave Sim can be eliminated, the

Above: Dave and Chester. Top: Chris Ware's cover for McSweeney's Quarterly Concern *13.*

Penguin covers by (clockwise from bottom left) Art Spiegelman, Tomer Hanuka, Seth, Chris Ware, Frank Miller, and Charles Burns.

gold standard for graphic novels is cut to .003 % of its present length.

Looking on the bright side, however—and something I definitely should have mentioned—I consider it a definite bright side in our field that Craig Thompson had *absolutely no notion* that there might be a reason why Art Spiegelman or Chris—excuse me—*Mr.* Ware wouldn't agree to speak to me. I consider it a bright side that Seth agreed to do an interview for the "Advise & Consent" issue when you and I both know that he wouldn't be caught dead reading *Cerebus*, that you agreed to do one, and that you agreed to have your letter printed here. It certainly more than outweighs, for me, the fact that Mr. Ware (I infer from your references that you spoke to him, and that I should use the honorific from my lowly place here beneath The List) wouldn't even return my phone call. Who knows? Maybe the exclusionary and elitist approach of The List members will die out with the present generation, and in the future, dialogue between graphic novelists—whatever they personally think of each other's work—will become the accepted norm across the whole spectrum of approaches to the comic-book medium—from the avant garde to mainstream superhero work. Hey, it's not unheard of. Chip Kidd designed Alex Ross's *Mythology* book from DC, and he's a card-carrying List guy in good standing, right?

I certainly intend to make that as much the policy of *my* part of *Following Cerebus* as I can, and I'm pleased that Craig and John are right with me on that.

More communication and less elitism, that's the key, I think.

I have a dim memory of speaking to Chris Ware about Cerebus *many years ago. He had either never read your stuff or only read a bit of it and hadn't liked it. I told him how great I thought* Cerebus *was, and he said that maybe he'd try reading it or reading it again. Then we moved onto talking about something else. That was the one and only time I've talked to Chris about you or your work. I apologize for the careless phrasing of my note which makes it look like I have the inside scoop on why Chris never called you back. That was just guess-work on my part, and I should have made it clear that that was the case.*

You say that what bothers you "about The List is the sense of More Validity Than Thou that seems to accompany membership on it," and then you mention the media attention that Spiegelman, Ware, Seth, Clowes and I are receiving and the way it's similar to the attention Frank Miller and Alan Moore got in the past. Then you conclude with, "I should be so lucky. Which is kind of my point." I agree—your work is equal to or better than any of the cartoonists you mentioned in that paragraph. You should be so…well, lucky isn't the word—you deserve as much attention.

On the other hand, I disagree with your contention that List-cartoonists are having a sour-grapes reaction to the length of your graphic novel. At a certain point many years ago, the "gold standard" for length in a completed graphic novel was probably set by Jack Katz's The First Kingdom, *but nobody was ever jealous of Katz's achievement because* The First Kingdom *was a pile of shit. It didn't matter how big it was—you're not going to be jealous of a big pile of shit. To most Listers (not me)* Cerebus *looks about equal in quality to* The First Kingdom. *There are so many things that put them off about* Cerebus*—the fantasy setting, the superhero parodies, the melodrama, the cinematic techniques—let's talk about the basic drawing style. You come from the romantic-idealism school of Raymond and Foster. Listers hate that stuff. There is a fundamental difference between the way you see and the way List-members*

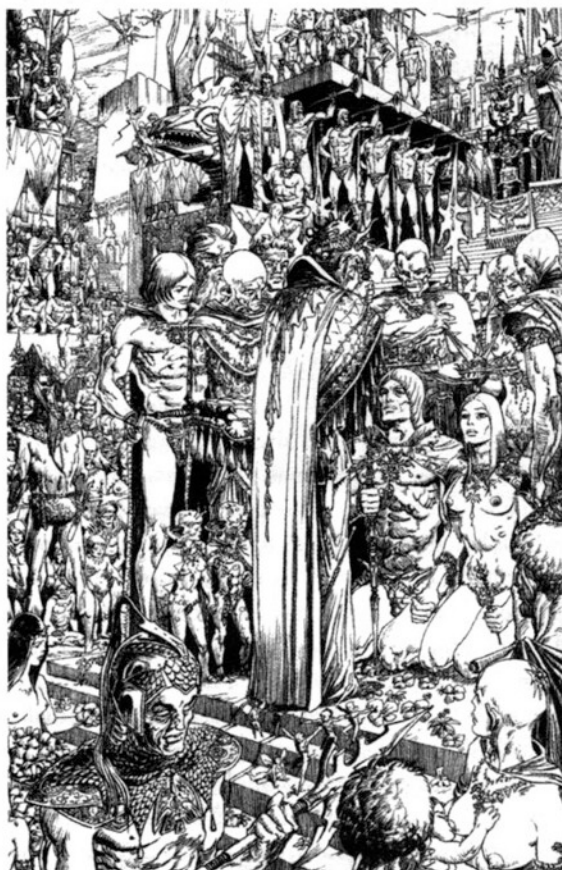
see. An example would be that you seem to think Julie Doucet drew herself as ugly (based on what you wrote on page 482 in Latter Days*). Listers look at Julie's self-portraits and see drawings of a cute, attractive young woman. Before we met her, Seth, Joe, and I were wondering if she was going to be as cute in real life as she drew herself, 'cause we thought she looked adorable in* Dirty Plotte*. You just don't see the way we do—at least when it comes to cartooning. Most Listers look at your drawings and experience a gut level "yuck" reaction, the same way they do when they look at the artwork of* The First Kingdom*. For most of us who've acclimatized ourselves to seeing cartoonists like Bud Fisher, George Herriman, Harold Gray, Frank King, and (yes) Julie Doucet as good, Dave Sim's drawings are...well, far from that type of work. And that assessment has nothing to do with whether or not you're a misogynist or how big your graphic novel is.*

Julie Doucet

(Personally, I like your drawing style. For the most part. When you're not getting too "photo-realistic." But it's not nearly as nice as Julie's drawing style.)

You hope that, in the future, "dialogue between graphic novelists—whatever they personally think of each other's work—will become the accepted norm across the whole spectrum of approaches to the comic-book medium." Why? In the world of contemporary novelists, is there any reason why Jackie Collins should be talking to Jonathan Franzen? "More communication and less elitism, that's the key." The key to what? World peace? Ending poverty? Getting everyone to accept that Cerebus *is brilliant? What?*

By the way, the group photo in The New York Times Magazine *was of Seth, me, Joe Sacco, Art Spiegelman, and (more confirmation that he's on the list) Adrian Tomine. There were separate shots of Chris Ware and Dan Clowes. The cover-date was July 11th, 2004.*

See, that's one of the things that does both fascinate and astonish me about you avant garde guys—the level of sheer *ill-mannered malice* that you guys possess and feel fully entitled to vent towards the work of others just because it doesn't fall within the narrow confines of your avant garde scales of value. I didn't mean to suggest that it's *just* jealousy about the length of *Cerebus* that is at the root of the ill-mannered malice directed towards me—although I do think that is a major bone of contention (however repressed) across the ranks of those in advanced middle-age (40 and older) in the comic-book field. I think, primarily, the irrational and poisonous loathing that I've experienced over the last ten years originates far more in the extreme intolerance of leftists of the very existence of viewpoints other than their own (abortion is a virtue, capitalism is a vice, war is always wrong, fornication is a fine hobby for everyone, the best movies will show us the right way to live, etc.). But I do think there is a rich green-eyed vein running through that malice now that more books—dare I suggest, more REAL graphic novels of the length of *High Society* and *Jaka's Story*—are being produced that take longer than an

Jack Katz's First Kingdom *(left) and Sim's* Cerebus *(above): distinction without a difference to a "Lister"?*

spond viscerally to the *New Yorker* style Seth practices, I don't envisage my own *New Yorker* covers or *New Yorker* cartoons or think in terms of *New Yorker* stories or articles. But I don't look down on someone who does as somehow beneath me because he thinks in cartoon terms and not in realistic terms. On the contrary, I am appreciative that someone has bothered to import that viewpoint into the comic-book field, and I'm glad Seth has stuck with it and refined it to the extent that he has as another entryway "look" available to others. But I would certainly be very careful about what I was describing as "a pile of shit" if I had a drawing style that most other guys in the field could "do" with a lot less difficulty than they would have "doing," say, Neal Adams' or Alex Ross's style.

I think you guys would be well served, and the field in general would be well served, if you would stop being so afraid that everyone is looking down on you and lose this Belligerent Misunderstood Schoolyard Nerd persona just because that's who Robert Crumb chose to be and that's what a Real Cartoonist is in the eyes of *The Comics Journal.* I think I'm safe in saying that none of you are going to get closer to the heights trod by Robert Crumb just by being as needlessly and unconscionably rude as he is about aptitudes and interests which lie outside of those he chooses for himself. In my opinion, he is Robert Crumb *in spite of* his rudeness, not *because of* it.

There exists a whole spectrum of radar screens and, as a cartoonist, you're on some of them, and you're not on others—whoever you are. The fact that I've sold more books than you have doesn't make me better than you any more than the fact that Alex Ross sells more books than I have makes him better than me. Nor do I think that, nor do I think Alex Ross thinks that. However, if you'll forgive me tooting our own horns, I think the one thing we seem to learn on this side of the fence, and which you scrupulously tend to avoid on your side of the fence, is that everyone has his own audience. Some audience members cross over into other audiences, and some don't. There are guys who read my work who would never read yours in a million years, and there are guys who read your work who would never read mine in a million years. I have discriminating intelligent readers, and I have complete idiot readers, and so do you. So does Alex Ross. But I don't think any of us, purely in human terms, exists on so lofty a plateau that we can afford to call the earnest efforts of others "piles of shit."

So why not leave such things aside and discuss what we see—sharing our respective viewpoints—without resorting to the infantile and uncivilized pejoratives like referring to someone else's work as a "pile of shit"? The "key" I was referring to wasn't to world peace, ending poverty, or having everyone acknowledge Cerebus' brilliance—I'll leave mythologies like world peace and ending poverty to the Marxists who believe it can be brought about by man-made methods and, as I said, I long ago accepted that very few people as a percentage of society at large would ever think *Cerebus* was brilliant or even be aware that it exists—no, what I was referring to is the key to forward progress in any field which can only be achieved, in my view, through civil discourse, genuine communication- and honest exchanges of viewpoints.

I've always been curious about other viewpoints, and I always like to see them well-expressed. That's one of the things that I hope to accomplish with my contributions to *Following Cerebus.* That's the reason that the "Advise & Consent" issue featured the views of everyone from Neil Gaiman to Joe Matt. We all think the comic book medium is a great one—there's no other explanation for the mind-boggling number of hours that we all need to devote to it to achieve even the smallest body of work consisting of a few dozen or a few hundred or a few thousand pages—and, to me, that gives us a common frame of reference worth exploring and…if *some of us* can stop sulking around the schoolyard and being Sullen Bellig-

Left and below: Seth covers for The New Yorker.

erent Nerds, maybe there are things that we can learn by raising our level of communication above the level of describing the work of others as "a pile of shit."

Don't you think?

In saying that "To most Listers (not me) Cerebus *looks about equal in quality to* The First Kingdom," *I am clearly implying that your work looks like shit to other "avant garde" cartoonists, so let me hasten to add that, any time the subject of* Cerebus *has come up in conversation with such cartoonists, they've always communicated their dislike for your book in mild and polite terms. I can't recall any of them expressing their opinions of your work in venomous ways or using the word "shit" to describe it. Likewise, I can't recall any AG cartoonist using that word to describe* The First Kingdom *either. Please don't use my blunt crudeness to condemn the entire "avant garde." (You were doing that out of kindness, right? Rather than jump straight for my throat, you spread the blame around so that your response would seem less personally harsh to me.)*

I should also add that while I seem to be your strongest advocate in the AG ranks, not all of them dislike everything you've done. Some of them do express admiration for certain aspects of your work or particular Cerebus *volumes. There is always a danger of misrepresentation in generalizing about a large and diverse group of people.*

Brown: **"If Jim Lee, Bill Sienkiewicz, and Alex Ross have produced anything that compares favourably to *The Poor Bastard* or *Cerebus* (...etc.), let me know."**

And, of course, I can see that Jim Lee, Bill Sienkiewicz, and Alex Ross can draw well. But being able to draw is only part of producing good comic-strip work. Those three gentlemen can draw better than Joe Matt, but I prefer to read Joe's work. Lee, Sienkiewicz, and Ross can, as you noted, draw better than you, but I prefer to read your work. In my opinion, you and Joe are better cartoonists. I don't think that's a matter of moving the goal posts so that you and Joe have an unfair advantage. If Lee, Sienkiewicz, and Ross have produced anything that compares favourably to The Poor Bastard *or* Cerebus *(or* Ice Haven, *or* Jimmy Corrigan, *or* Maus, *or* Wimbledon Green, *etc.), let me know.*

The last time we got to this point in the discussion, we were passing through the University of Toronto campus, and I admitted to you that I had never actually read my *Rip Kirby* collections, which really amused you and, I'm sure, validated your opinion that Alex Raymond wasn't much of a cartoonist. I'm more interested in net effects and, as an example, charting the evolution of the drawing—and particularly inking—style from Raymond through John Prentice to Stan Drake to Neal Adams and Al Williamson. How spontaneous is your line?—what's the balance of brush strokes to pen strokes?—how many lines do you allow yourself to use?

Yes, we certainly "see" differently because the evolution of that viewpoint is inherently interesting to me completely apart from the stories that they're illustrating—which were mostly all written by Elliot Caplan, Al Capp's brother—those that weren't written by his other brother, Jerry, anyway, and as a result were about as interesting as narrative comic strips intended for a general newspaper audience in the 1940s and 1950s are going to be. In which category I quite decidedly include *Little Orphan Annie* and *Gasoline Alley* and the other strips that make you avant garde guys weak in the knees and that you think merit special Pulitzer if not Nobel Prizes.

I'm interested in what I consider to be the best art and the best story. If they're the same guy—and here I would cite Wrightson's Edgar Alan Poe adaptations for Warren and his *Badtime Stories* volume—fine: if not, I'm not going to bypass Alan Moore because he isn't drawing *From Hell* or Eddie Campbell because he isn't writing it. So the mental image I have when you ask me to think of examples of Jim Lee's work or Bill's or Alex Ross' is of "skyer no higher" pages that I've either not read or for which I consider the text to be largely irrelevant. I always wanted Al Williamson or Bill or Neal Adams to buy the rights to, say, *Death of a Salesman* or *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* and do that or similar "genuinely mature" themes on their own, but it just doesn't seem to be in the nature of guys who draw like that. Why? I have no idea. I consider *Secret Agent X-9* to be Al Williamson's best work because he was working too fast to get self-conscious or to become "too careful," so there are amazing inking effects spilling onto his strips from his unconscious. At the same time I haven't read any of it because, again, they're newspaper strips. True, they're written by Archie Goodwin, but it's Archie Goodwin doing the gig: basically asking himself, how would Al Capp's brother write this, and what do I know Al Williamson wants to draw? At the same time Frazetta leaves me cold most of the time, and most Williamson nuts are Frazetta nuts. So go figure.

And I will grant you I have had good and bad experiences with the avant garde. When you asked Dylan Horrocks if he wanted to meet me, he said yes, and he seemed genuinely glad to do so, and I enjoyed meeting him and seeing his slide show. At the same time you asked if I wanted to meet a visiting European cartoonist, and I said "Sure," and then you asked him if he wanted to meet me, and the guy made a circling motion at his temple—even as he admitted that he had never read my work, never met me, and only knew about me from the *Comics Journal* and their malignant message boards.

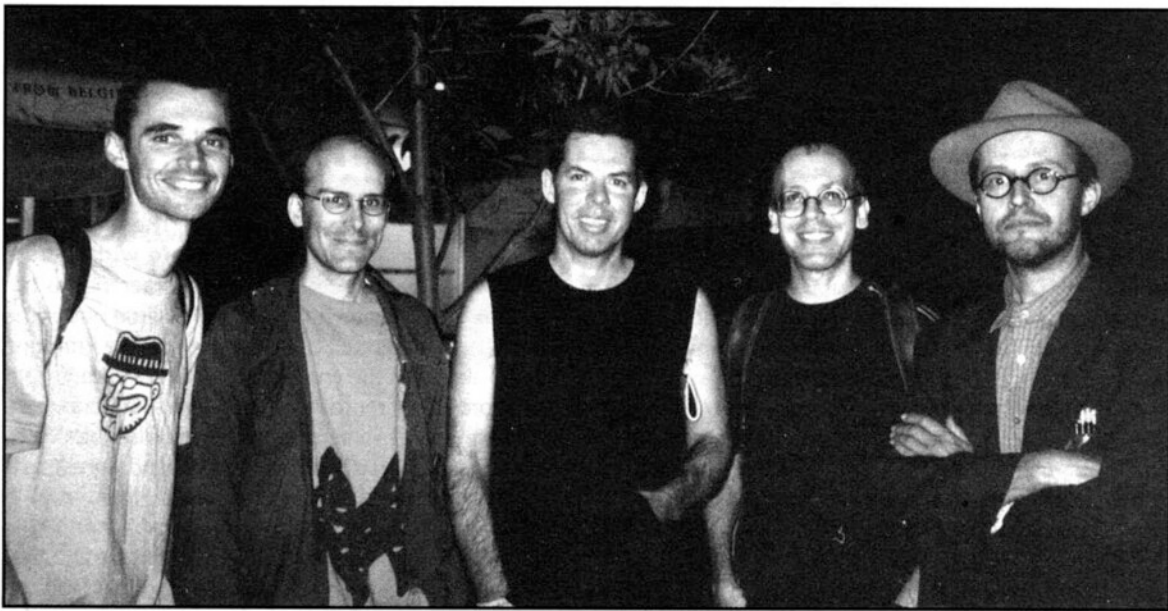
I often suspect that that's a big part of the problem. Because the Fantagraphics guys get linked to the *Comics Journal,* it's always assumed that they share

Clockwise from top left: Seth, Chester Brown, Adrian Tomine, Art Spiegelman, and Joe Sacco, as they appeared in The New York Times Magazine.

hour to read, books I suspect will be seen by posterity as *actual* graphic novels and another name will be invented for the vast numbers of shorter works—"albums," maybe? I think this has led—or will ultimately lead—to a kind of "career panic" in a lot of quarters among guys now in their forties and fifties who are slowing down dramatically and are having to face the fact that they will be lucky to produce another hundred or two hundred pages in what remains of their lives and what will those one hundred or two hundred pages be? One book? Two books? It also seems to me (as long as we're being this blunt with each other) that you guys—univer-

Sim: **"I certainly don't pencil and ink as well as Gerhard does ."**

sally—don't draw very well and that you've tended to "club together" as members of the same group for that reason with notable exceptions like Jaime Hernandez and Adrian Tomine from the realism school. You draw stylishly and stylistically and in a stylized fashion, but it's more a matter that you settled for something easier to accomplish after having failed to make the cut with more challenging styles. There's no shame in that. In my view the vast majority of independent creators, self-publishers, and the avant garde are all in the same boat. Let's face the fact that you and I both tried to get in at Marvel and/or DC and didn't make it. We can both safely say, as I think all artists can safely say, "I try as hard as I can, but this is as good as I draw. Some pages are better than others." I freely confess that I don't draw nearly as well as most of the guys in my category of more realistic rendering—I certainly don't pencil and ink as well as Gerhard does to use an obvious example—and I certainly didn't and don't have the chops to do mainstream work at the top levels of competition. But I have to say that I don't in any way share this level of...*venomous loathing*...for Jim Lee and Bill Sienkiewicz and Alex Ross, guys who can draw and paint rings around me and you and everyone else in the field without breaking a sweat that I see exhibited on your side of the comic-book fence. That level of venomous loathing, in my experience, is really hard to explain any other way than repressed jealousy. I think the more sensible approach is to say, "I don't have the ability those guys have" and maintain a level of appropriate respect for those who are capable of doing what you are not capable of doing insted of inventing a new category of standards where you are better than they are.

Tangential to that and by way of reinforcing my larger point, I think your choice to describe Jack Katz's work as "a pile of shit"—which I find otherwise inexplicable when coming from someone who is in all other ways as scrupulously polite as I know you to be—issues from the profound and deep-rooted fear that your own work is "a pile of shit" and that that's what people who draw better than you think when they look at it. In my experience that tends not to be the case. A guy who draws at the highest levels of competence in the field doesn't have any *need* to sneer at others the way the practitioners of the avant garde do. Actually being self-evidently more adept in the upper reaches of realistic drawing usually (not always, but usually) comes with a level of basic human grace attached to it, the grace to be civil with one's peers—even with a peer who is being so infantile as to describe other peoples' work as "a pile of shit." I mean, I don't think less of Seth because he never became Dean Motter or Jaime Hernandez, although there was clearly a time when he was trying his hardest to do so. He found the style that he was comfortable with eventually, and that's his style. There are people who like it, and there are people who don't like it. I don't personally think much of the *New Yorker* cartoon style. I mean that in a literal sense—I not only don't re-

Dylan Horrocks, Chester Brown, Dave Sim, Joe Matt, and Seth (Innis Town Hall, University of Toronto, July 31, 2001)

that magazine's venomous derision for anything that isn't Fantagraphics or Drawn & Quarterly and Top Shelf. So that can become a self-fulfilling reality in social situations where you don't know the guys and (I often wonder) possibly becomes just part of the behaviour you adopt when you sign a contract with Gary and Kim. "I now officially hate everything but the approved books." At the same time, it must be said that when it became common knowledge a few years back that Art Spiegelman had an "enemies list," that did seem to confirm that venomous loathing wasn't an exaggerated assessment of "that end" of the field. And that certainly was in the back of my mind when the idea of phoning "Artie" out of a clear blue sky was suggested. Even if I wasn't on his list, I could be pretty sure that I was probably thematically linked to several guys that were, and that this here was a guy who took his avant garde vs. the comic-book field infidels dichotomies straight, with no chaser. I mean, seriously. The man has an *enemies list.* Best be letting the man be, Dave.

I had a nice chat with Gary Panter in Columbus at the slide show he did with Peter Bagge and Jessica Abel and was surprised not only that he remembered me at TCAFF but that he had said he had liked the jam strip that you and I had in the TCAFF program booklet.

I guess what I'm saying is that just because Gary and Kim and Art Spiegelman and Robert Crumb are the way they are, I don't really understand what is served by making that the avant garde "way to be." Nor am I advocating dragging them out of their respective malignant solitudes to actually address preferences other than their own or people who don't think the way they do. If that's what they like, that's what they like. The same reason that I don't accept social invitations for the most part. You really emotionally wound leftists and spoil their good time by holding opinions that they don't share. They lob a "George W. Bush is an idiot" observation that they assume everyone not wearing a three-piece suit agrees with,and when I say "Actually, I'm probably about a half dozen steps to the *right* of George W. Bush." And they're *stricken,* mortally *stricken.* Why socialize with people whose state of happiness is that precariously balanced? It just seems needlessly cruel.

I'll give you the last word.

You took that enemies-list thing seriously? It always seemed likely to me that it was some sort of joke. And even if Art was serious—well, I'm certainly capable of getting angry, but I don't think that those moments completely define who I am. I've only met Spiegelman a few times, but he seemed like a sweet and likeable guy.

You don't have to consider that to be the last word if you have anything more you want to say about Spiegelman (or anything else).

It's hard to tell. On the one hand, I can say from long experience that it's a common tactic for leftists to claim that they were just kidding if you actually corner them on something...and, on the other hand, of course, there's the level of jealousy that Spiegelman's Pulitzer for *Maus* tends to excite in his leftist peers. Harvey Pekar took a hard run at him in the *Comics Journal's* "Blood and Thunder" letters page, and there was that exposé—or, rather, "exposé"—of Spiegelman that appeared in the *Village Voice* a while back written by one of the green-eyed wannabes who basically envied him his Upper West Side party invitations.

Anything more that I want to say about Spiegelman? Say, Chet—you aren't suggesting that I should bring up the "*The New Yorker* Mind Game," are you?

COMING SOON: *The* New Yorker *Mind Game!*

One for Sorrow by Lee Thacker

Review by Dave Sim

I couldn't quite believe it when Lee Thacker referred (quite casually and in various spots) to his 800-page graphic novel in another publication of his which he sent me (*My Year*, a daily diary he was keeping in comics form): his *completed* 800-page graphic novel *One for Sorrow*. In commenting on the initial work, I—in an equally casual fashion—mentioned that I was interested in reading it and wondered if he was willing to trade for a copy. He has to produce them on a photocopier individually so it seemed a little presumptuous to just ask him to assemble one for me gratis. They arrived—eight hand-bound volumes of 100 pages each—a couple of days into Ramadan. I read the first handful of pages and realized it was distinctly not Ramadan reading material and put it aside. And then I never got around to picking up the first one again until Ramadan had been over for a number of weeks. On the one hand unforgivable but on the other hand, hey, it is an 800-page graphic novel.

I motored through it in about a week of reading in between getting my regular work done. It wasn't oppressive in the sense of being completely amateurish. Reading 800 pages of amateur material would really be pushing the limits of endurance. Lee's artwork exists on an interesting borderline between amateur and professional. Mostly he reminds me of early Jaime Hernandez and Adrian Tomine both in terms of his subject matter and in terms of his drawing style which is a very difficult style to master. You do the face in a mere handful of lines, and how it comes out depends on any number of variables. Overall there's improvement but it is fitful. A handful of pages that compete with the best that Jaime and Adrian bring to their work and then flattening out (intentionally?) into something more iconic that owes more to Charles Burns. It makes full use of icons, *One for Sorrow* does.

The story is its greatest strength. To whatever extent it isn't locked into a pure "eye candy" motif the story is going to have to be strong enough to carry the reader through and *One for Sorrow* certainly is. With most early attempts at a graphic novel, you're going to get a lot of traditional story and storytelling devices with a few good moments here and there. The situation with my own reading of *One for Sorrow* was the reverse. The whole thing is incredibly inventive and engaging with a mere handful of sequences that I would characterize as traditional. That's no mean trick the first time out of the gate. The story is told out of sequence (the Prologue comes almost at the end—you can't get much further out of order—or more inventive—than that) and there any number of moments where I would think "Nope, he's lost the thread" and have to remind myself that this is an unpublished creator, I have to lower my expectations, etc. And virtually every time—not all the time—but virtually every time it would turn out that he was being intentionally confusing—losing the reader in a general sense rather than me specifically—and then the events would start falling into place again. I get it, I get it. And the Need To Know What Happens Next was pretty much relentless from the first twenty pages onward. It was only when I was done reading the book that I read his annotations and found out that in his youth, he had gone from reading the *Fantastic Four* to reading *Cerebus* to reading *Love & Rockets* to reading Howard Chaykin's *Big Black Kiss* in a very short space of time. That explains a great deal when you are discussing a germinating graphic novelist and what that would lead him to attempt.

What would be a good litmus test of whether or not you would want to buy your own copy of *One for Sorrow*? I'd say buy the first one and if you can stand not knowing what happens next when you come to the end of the first 100 pages, then I've missed my guess and you'll only be out the 8 quid (roughly 16 dollars American). There were a number of times in the course of my reading when I had to reassure myself "It's all here—beginning, middle and end." Had he sent me only, say, the first five volumes as a work in progress I would've been sweating bullets partway through the fifth one. I say this by way of warning because if your reaction is the same as mine

At right: interior pages, including one in which Thacker employs Neal Adams's "hidden image" technique discussed in this issue's "Mind Games" essay (see page 2).

or roughly the same as mine and you order, say, the first two and come to the end you're probably going to try and phone Lee and get him to act the rest out over the phone or get him to FedEx the other six volumes to you and imagine how much that's going to cost?

When he writes in his notes for Book Three "The Big Issue":

> Matt Silvie at Fantagraphics corresponded with me for some time and eventually wrote a very flattering review in *The Comics Journal* [*issue 205*]. This caught the attention of a handful of people, including British Small Press legend Paul Gravett. He phoned me out of the blue one day asking if I'd be interested in contributing to 'CRISP' a now defunct annual 'comics happening' in London. I sent him some pages for the exhibition and Kirstie and I got soaked running through London one weekend trying to find the gallery. It was small, nobody was there, and my stuff was displayed downstairs with no explanation of who I was or what the story was about. The pages had been spray mounted onto thick card and hung on the wall. They weren't even in glass frames! I was gutted. But it was a thrill all the same. That was my only moment of fame during the entire time it took to complete this project. No wonder I became reticent to carry on in later years.

There is really something in that. If it's extremely unlikely that someone would finish an 800-page graphic novel in the first place it seems (at least!) doubly unlikely once the lack of reaction is factored in. Kirstie, his long-time girlfriend, was virtually his only reader throughout.

So, anyway, fair warning. If you want the whole thing it will cost you roughly $128 US, and I'm pretty sure that if you read the first one you'll pay it, uncomplainingly. I could have been a real "smarty-boots" and just suggested that you all buy the first one *knowing* that the $16 initiation would lead directly to the $128 investment but I'm being as up-front as I can. And look at it this way—each copy will be put together by hand and autographed by Lee himself. And what do you suppose those will be going for in twenty years time when *One for Sorrow* finally gets the wider distribution it deserves?

Yes, exactly.

Note from Lee Thacker: *"The handmade editions that Dave talks about in the review are no longer available (I don't have the time or resources any more to photocopy 800 pages!) with the exception of Book One. The best place to get the whole story is via the Lulu site (www.lulu.com/leethacker). I have about twenty copies of the handmade Book Ones left, and they've been selling well on eBay, where people can purchase a copy, or by contacting me directly. I'm also offering a free panel reproduction (original art, 3"x4", brush and ink on card) for anyone who buys the handmade book one (£8.00 + postage). My website is still under construction, but you can see some sample pages from Book One at http://www.comix.org.uk/rawshark/."*

Shuster Hall of Fame Speeches

Hal Foster Acceptance Speech
April 30, 2005

I can safely say that I have never felt so gratified, so humbled, and so intimidated—simultaneously—as when the author of *Hal Foster, Prince of Illustrators, Father of the Adventure Strip*, Mr. Brian M. Kane of Columbus, Ohio left me a phone message saying that the Foster family had asked that I accept this posthumously-awarded Shuster Hall of Fame plaque on their behalf.

From the time he began work on the *Tarzan* newspaper strip in 1929 to when he retired from his beloved Sunday page landmark, *Prince Valiant* in 1971, Hal Foster has been universally hailed in our field as one of the tripartite deans of cartoon realism alongside Alex Raymond of *Flash Gordon* and *Rip Kirby* and Milt Caniff of *Terry and the Pirates* and *Steve Canyon*. Each generation of comic strip—and later comic *book*—artists have credited Hal Foster with being a primary influence on their own works.

In the comic book field, among the first generation of illustrators, such diverse talents as Joe Shuster, the late Will Eisner, Lou Fine, Sheldon Moldoff, and Jack Kirby; among the second generation, Frank Frazetta—who even adapted elements of Foster's signature calligraphy as his own—Wallace Wood, Al Williamson, Angelo Torres, and Murphy Anderson; and among the third generation, Bernie Wrightson, Barry Windsor-Smith, Michael Kaluta, and Jeff Jones all owed a large—and wholly credited—debt to the works of Hal Foster. As a member of the fourth generation to be influenced by him—standing here before you today—I feel like a Shakespearean actor inexplicably promoted—however temporarily—from metaphorical spear-carrier to metaphorical knighthood.

I'm tempted to just read aloud the full text of Mr. Kane's definitive biography published by Vanguard Press of Lebanon, New Jersey in 2001, and see how long it would take before someone cuts me off—to read to you of Hal Foster's birth in Halifax on August 16, 1892, of how the family relocated to Winnipeg in 1905, of Foster's many adventures in the Canadian wilderness and along the Red River as a lifelong enthusiast of canoeing and hunting, of his abbreviated boxing career, of his self-education at Winnipeg's Carnegie Library and of how, in 1920, Foster secured a job with the Hudson Bay Company as a staff clerk earning $17.50 a week and where he was later hired to draw sketches of women's intimate apparel. "I put my whole soul into the work," he said later, more than slightly tongue-in-cheek. "I don't know when I'd been more interested," He worked variously in Winnipeg at commercial art studios like Brigden's Limited, the Commercial Art Company, and the Buckley Studio.

It was the threat of Depression-era starvation more than anything else that brought Hal Foster to the newspaper strip. Originally he hadn't been interested in illustrating Tarzan past the 10-week adaptation of Edgar Rice Burroughs' first novel, feeling that he would be prostituting his talent in doing so. He would say later, "I was a bit offended to be asked to sell my birthright for a mess of pottage. But I thought, 'wouldn't it be nice if I had a little bit of pottage right now?'" Initially, Foster had been content just to churn out the pages, but then the letters started coming in. "I suddenly realized the comics page gave pleasure to millions," he said, "and changed my attitude about just scratching out the artwork." He noted that his wife, Helen, helped him control his inflated ego. So did the miserly page rates, which caused him to choose to create his own

feature in 1937, a feature he would continue fir thirty-four years and nearly two thousand pages, the legendary (in every sense of the term) *Prince Valiant in the Days of King Arthur.*

As I wrote in my own tribute which was edited out of the manuscript of Mr. Kane's book—there were just too many high-powered names with greater seniority—in parodying a number of comic strip and comic book artists' styles in the pages of *Cerebus*, I always found it easy enough to decipher and exaggerate their little drawing tricks and inking idiosyncrasies. That worked fine until I introduced a Prince Valiant parody, Lord Silverspoon. into the storyline. I soon discovered—as so many before me had discovered—that there were no tricks or obscurant idiosyncrasies to the work of Hal Foster. It was all pure drawing knowledge, an *encyclopaedic* knowledge of anatomy, drapery, light, shadow, composition, line weight and texture, and the precise interaction of all those elements on the finished page. As his long-time letterer, Charles F. Armstrong, wrote of Foster's determination to enter into a formal program of study when he was already a successful commercial illustrator: "It meant his giving up vacations, nights, Saturdays, and holidays to the drawing and observation of bones, muscles, and nerves. And believe me, this is work that is tedious, boring, and time-consuming. I know—having studied under the same anatomy fanatic, Charles Schroeder."

Having already exceeded the universally agreed-upon limits of the duration of an acceptance speech—an exceptional circumstance which I hole you will forgive in light of the accomplishments and wide-ranging influence of the award recipient—I'll conclude now by reiterating how pleased and delighted, humbled, and intimidated I am to accept this award on behalf of the Prince of Illustrators, the Father of the Adventure Strip, and the greatest native-born Canadian ever to devote his life to bringing the highest and most exacting standards of illustrative realism to the comics page, Harold Rudolf Foster.

Thank you.

—Dave Sim

Dave Sim Acceptance Speech
April 29, 2006

I was at Paradise Comics a while back, and Pete Dixon swung his laptop computer screen around and asked if I wanted to check out the hall of Fame inductees for this year's show. I said sure, and I must admit that my first reaction when I saw my name there was to check to make sure there was only the birth year attached to it.

1956. Hyphen. Blank.

I must tell you, it came as quite a relief.

Speaking as the, so far, only *living* inductee into the Joe Shuster Hall of Fame, I have to say that I have four small regrets that I have preceded four individuals in doing so and ask you to help assuage my conscience by giving a nice round of applause to each of them when I read their names out.

The first is the individual most responsible for there even being a Canadian comics fandom, writer, raconteur, publisher, gadfly, and pioneer Canadian comic-store owner Captain George Henderson.

The second is my personal mentor and compatriot and collaborator back in the early days of my career, the late Howard E. "Gene" Day.

And the third and fourth are the Canadian trailblazers of the graphic novel, *The Sacred & The Profane*, one of whom is here today, and I'll ask that he stand up and take a bow, Dean Motter. And his collaborator who isn't here, of course, is Ken Steacy.

Keeping this as short as possible—bearing in mind that my *Collected Letters 2004* ran 600 pages, and that only covered January through June—I will only add that I hope Gerhard is less than seven years behind me when it comes to his own induction. *Cerebus* certainly couldn't have been completed without him. And I'd also ask that you applaud once more if you favour the idea of inducting the Toronto Trio next year, Chester Brown, Seth, and as honorary Canadian, Joe Matt. Chester's here today. Stand up, Chet.

I quite agree. Thank you all for this signal honour, which is most unexpected and most gratefully received. There's really nothing worse than getting a Lifetime Achievement Award when you're still working—and nothing better than getting one when you're all done.

And there's really nothing better than being all done.

So, thank you.

I'm all done, now.

About Last Issue by Dave Sim

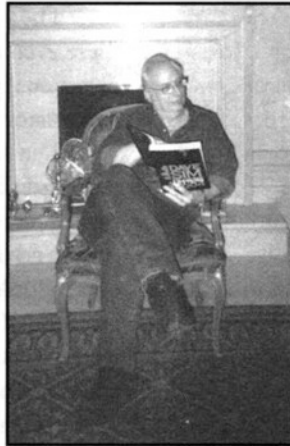
J. Michael Straczynski

The most amazing thing about meeting Joe in the bar after the Saturday of Torontocon was that I had thought he looked familiar from *Toronto.* I thought he was a retailer whose name I had forgotten and that was only reinforced when I looked him in the eye a second too long and he swerved to take up a place to my right, waiting for an opening in the conversation I was having with Hairy Tarantula. Which isn't actually his name, that's the name of the store he runs but that's what I always think of him as. Which left me with the problem of how to introduce two retailers neither of whose names I knew. So, I just said, "Excuse me, do you know...[to HT] I always mean to call you Hairy Tarantula [to JMS] that's not his name, that's the name of his store." At that point he introduced himself to Hairy Tarantula as "Joe Straczynski, I wrote *Babylon 5*" and both Hairy Tarantula and I just stood there staring at him. HT finally managed to thank Joe for all of the books of his that they sold. It was then that he told me he was a big fan of *Cerebus* and I sort of laughed and said, that's very nice of you to say. That was when he quoted the Elrod panel and, as he said, we finished in unison. We chatted amiably away and I kept waiting for him to make his excuses and move on-he was far and away the most famous person in the bar and part of being that famous is forward momentum. When it became obvious that he wasn't leaving unless I said something or left first, I suggested that we go and sit down and have a nice chat. Which we did.

It was one of the best nights I had had in a long, long time, as well. How good a night was it? I was able to laugh it off when I found out the van that I had my luggage in (I was scheduled to fly to Baltimore the following Monday) had been towed as the clock clicked down towards the Sabbath and I was a good forty minutes away from my airport hotel.

That's how good a night it was.

My First Buffy

I'd like to apologize to all the *Buffy* and *Angel* fans out there for making a mistake in my "My First *Buffy"* review in writing that Angel had "recovered" his soul when what I meant was that he had "lost" his soul. To be honest, I'm just taking Craig's word for it that that's what I meant, because I still have trouble following the internal logic of the show's backstory. Let's review. Angel achieves a moment of bliss by sleeping with Buffy, so he loses his soul. Except I thought that there was something in Joss Whedon's concept about he gets his soul back, and then he suffers, because you can't suffer if you haven't got a soul. Where is it? Ah: "They (the Gypsies) cursed him by giving him his soul back; thus he was haunted by his killings." So doesn't it follow from that that when he loses his soul again, he *won't* be haunted by his killings? And isn't that, according to the internal logic, a "plus"? I mean, if the Gypsies cursed him (I'm taking it as a given that being cursed is not a good thing) by giving him his soul back, doesn't that mean that by losing your soul, he's "un-cursed"? I mean, the only alternative explanation to me is that losing your soul is a terrible thing, and so is getting it back. In my book, that just doesn't add up.*

Dave Sim on TV

What was interesting on the WAGA Atlanta interview was that they had asked Lekas & Levine if I could draw on camera and Lekas & Levine asked me. "Of course," I said. I had spent my life talking and doing head sketches of Cerebus at the same time. I roughed in an outline and waited for the red light to come on indicating that we were "live.". And my hand absolutely locked in place. I forced it to start drawing but as soon as it did, I found I couldn't talk. With excruciating slowness I began drawing each component part of the head as if I was trying to do so with my left hand.

So Amanda Davis was alluding to a broken promise when she asked, "Let's see, how much have you finished there?" Not enough to hold it up and show the camera as we had agreed. "Oh, he's coming along." On camera, she was philosophical. "All right. Cerebus in the works." But I sure didn't get

*Craig's footnote: As I've written in *Spectrum*, Joss Whedon's cosmology starts to break down when put through an extensive logical examination. Dave has succinctly presented just one glitch here. Indeed, the Angel story, as worked out by Whedon and David Greenwalt, is a damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't dilemma. Then again, that *is* consistent with the pessimistic tone of the series as a whole and with passion specifically. As I wrote last issue, "The series poses a no-win dilemma—give in to the passions [that we didn't ask for] and be ruled by them, or live a hollow peace without them." Dave believes it's a false dilemma—there's room for argument, no doubt—but the internal logic of the show at least has some consistency here: whether it comes to souls or passions, we're all pretty much doomed. Have a nice day!

any heartfelt good-bye as I was leaving.

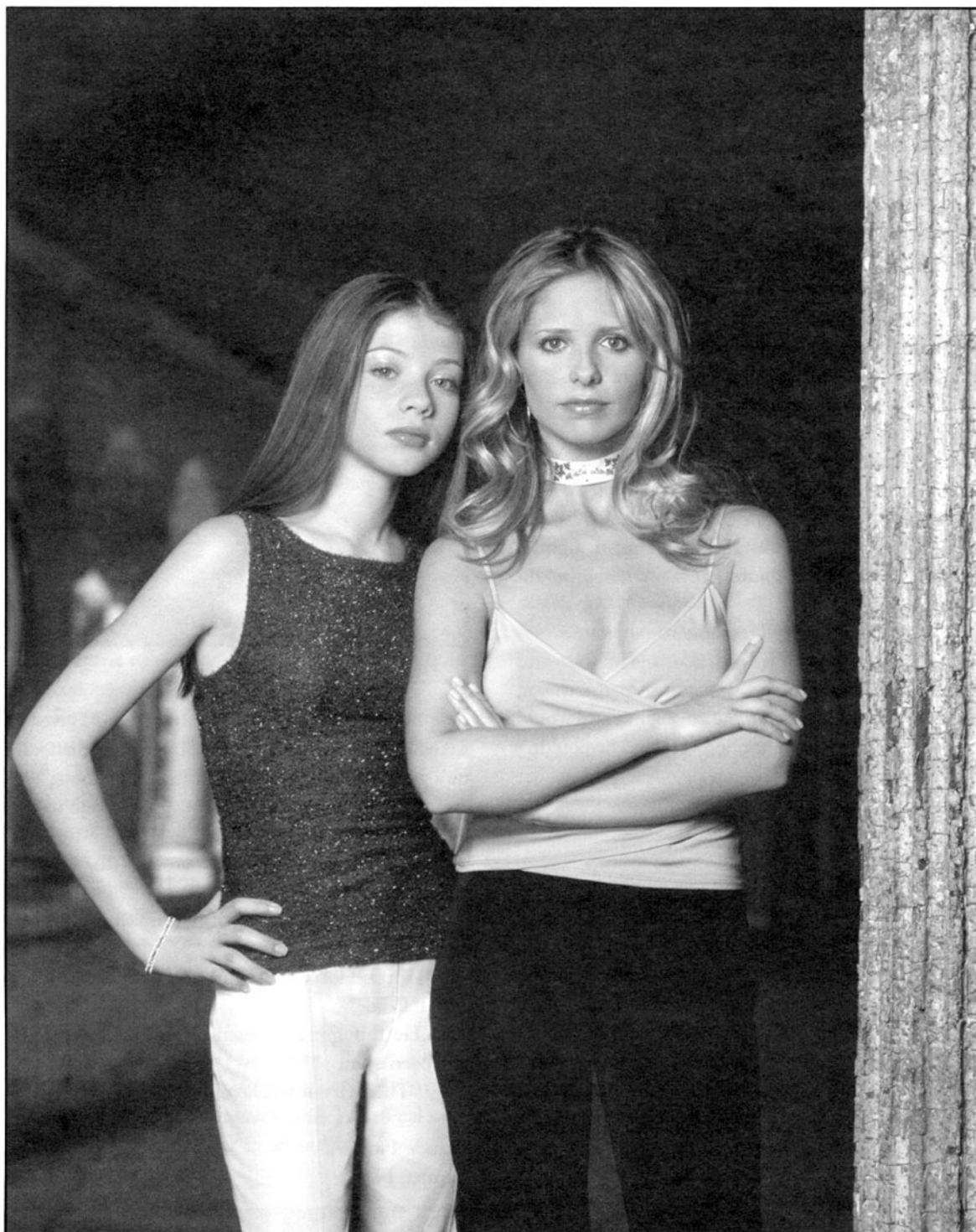
Automatic Pilot by Lee Sandlin

Very funny piece. Maybe we should skip Dave's Favourite Buffy Pic and just run a new Lee Sandlin column every issue.

Thou Good and Faithful Cerebite

Bryan Douglas hits another home run in my books. "Not *everything* is about that time I banged your sister."

Now *that's* funny.

Dave Sim's Favorite Buffy Pic This Month

I've often thought this must be really tough for an actress: to be playing *right next* to someone who is closer to the age you're supposed to be playing than you are. SMG is not exactly "over the hill" in her late twenties by most litmus tests, and she was certainly, at the time, younger *looking* than her years. But, still, there's no faking that you're in your *late* teens when you're standing next to someone who is still in her *mid*-teens. She's pretty good at holding her own (star billing will do that), but when you magnify the face on PhotoExplorer (as I just did—boy, is this a great job or what?), there's something in the set of her brows that says, very endearingly, "I'm not old, am I? Please tell me I'm not old." No, SMG, you're not old.

Mind Games

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Dave only thought he was commandeering the letters page from us on page 24! But we were hiding back here on page 38 with our own letters column. The first letter was actually sent to Dave, but he forwarded it to us so that we could share it with all of the readers.

Dear Dave,

Got some goodies for you!

Gen. Abizaid was here at work again today (he held another coining ceremony, which I got to view from the audience), and while I was typing away at my desk around 11 a.m., an officer stepped up and asked if he could use the telephone. "Please do," I told him, pointing to one at the desk beside me. After a moment of hearing him talk on the phone, I realized it was Abizaid's assistant, a major, saying the Commander was getting a haircut and would be on his way to a meeting momentarily. He hung up and stepped out to the hallway.

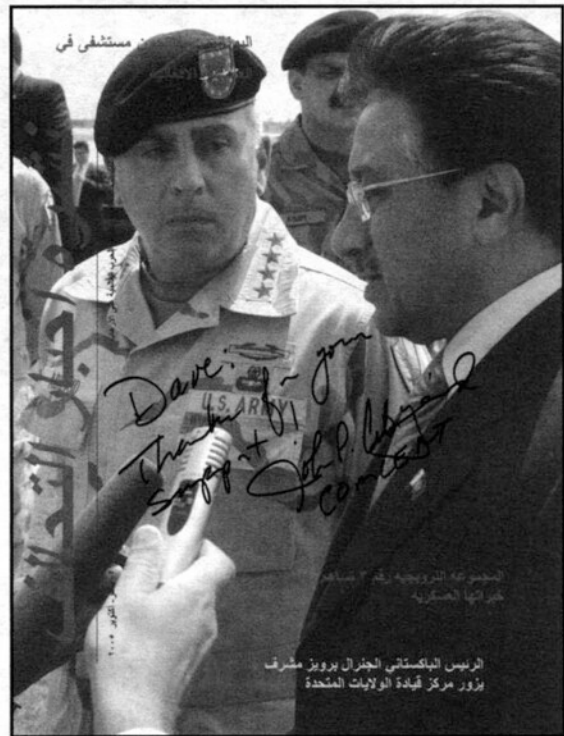
Well, the CENTCOM barber is one door down from where I work, so I grabbed two copies of the Coalition Bulletin with my photo on the cover and asked one of my superiors in the office if I could ask the General for his autograph. Would it be out of line?

"Ask his aide. He'll be able to tell you."

I dashed out of the office, magazines and Sharpie pen in hand, and walked up to the major, explaining that I had taken the cover shot and would love to have them autographed. He said he couldn't see anything wrong with that, but to let him to the talking. We chit-chatted for another few minutes until the Commander walked out. The major addressed him.

"Sir? This is Specialist Flowers. He took the photo on the cover of this Coalition Bulletin. Could you sign it for him?"

Gen Abizaid stepped toward me, and we shook hands. "Pleasure to meet you again, Sir," I said, fully expecting he wouldn't remember me, but thinking it would be the polite thing to say, and not wanting to look like a dick if he *did* remember.

He signed one copy for me. I had another one for you.

"Could you sign this for my friend Dave?" I asked. "He's a great patriot. He's a Canadian, and he's very supportive of what the U.S. is doing."

He did so and passed both mags back to me. SCORE!

"Give Specialist Flowers a coin," the General said to his aide.

"Actually, you gave me one a few months ago," I told him.

Abizaid looked off into the distance.

"I did?"

He thought a moment, then handed me the enclosed coin.

"Then give it to Dave."

Claude Flowers
Tampa, FL

Hey Guys,

I am pleased to announce to you the birth of my son Aidan Douglas Brooks. He joined us at 7:43 a.m. on 2-10-06, weighing in at 8 lbs. 11 oz. He measured a whopping 23 inches long! He is much better looking than either of us, and we love him dearly. We came home on Sunday and are doing quite well. Amy did incredible. I am very proud of her; she is one tough chick!

I have included a couple of pictures for you that might be of interest. In the cheesy Marvel tradition: 'Nuff said about that!

One more *Cerebus*/ baby note. Aidan LOVES *Cerebus* phone book covers. In my prenatal research I learned that infants are fascinated by and drawn to the stark contrast between black and white. They like people's faces with the dark and light spots, but love two-dimensional pictures with distinctly-separated blacks and whites. Of course, this occurs in the Ger/Sim trade covers better than anywhere else on the planet. So Aidan has spent a good chunk of time examining your line work! It is spellbinding to watch his little eyes dart back and forth across the page. His current favorite is the cover to *Jaka's Story*. He is also a fan of the beautiful sketch you did for Amy and me of *Cerebus* on the wedding cake after our honeymoon disaster. I am thinking about getting something framed to put above his crib for him to contemplate, maybe a *Young Cerebus* or something.

Aidan Brooks gets political

Right, enough baby talk. I have vowed (though obviously I am yet to be successful due to the tone of this letter) to *not* become one of "those guys" who do nothing but bore people about minutia of their children. "Oh Dave, you should have seen him the other day. He blinked. It was *sooo* amazing!!!" "Ummmmm, uhhh huh, well I can do that too. Do I get a prize?!?"

Jason Brooks
Northville, MI

Congratulations to you and Amy, Jason. We are kindred spirits: co-editor Craig Miller dressed his four-day-old daughter Jennifer in a specially-made Twin Peaks *bib (and later "onesie") based on his and John Thorne's pre-*Following Cerebus *publication* Wrapped in Plastic. *The bib pictured Chris Moeller's cover painting from* WIP *17 of a deceased Laura Palmer and read, "She's dead,*

Wrapped in Plastic." Family members were horrified and wondered if expensive therapy bills awaited Jen later in life. Craig countered that she would simply grow up to possess "a healthy sense of irony." (For pics and other assorted non-sentimentalistic weirdness, check out Jen's website at http://home.comcast.net/~jenmil/home.html.)

Your comment about Aidan's admiration for the Cerebus *art is interesting, because we've noticed the same thing about (now 2-1/2 year old) Jennifer. In fact, just a few weeks ago, she saw the first Cerebus "phone book" sitting on Craig's desk, picked it up, and started flipping though it. (She can't read yet, of course, but is already fascinated with books.) Craig, who had mentioned Cerebus to her only a couple of times before, asked who was on the cover. "Conan" she said, which all in all was a pretty good guess (no doubt influenced by all of the Barry Windsor-Smith Conan art on display in Craig's office). (A later guess was "horse." Since she doesn't know what an aardvark is, it wasn't a bad second guess.)*

Oh, what the heck, let's just go and print the photo (fortunately the camera is kept right behind the desk and so was handy when she grabbed the volume):

Jennifer Miller likes the little grey fellow

Hey, why stop there? People—send us your own Cerebus/*baby pics! We can make it a regular feature, like the Buffy-pic-of-the-month! And we can dub this the first*

Following Cerebus Baby Picture Page!

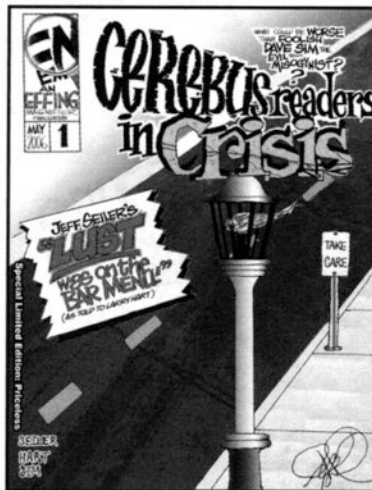
Baby pics in a Cerebus*-themed mag? Now there's irony for ya'!*

Another Thing Coming

NEWS & MORE

We're running *very* short on space this time around, so we're going to make this quick. Listen fast!

Dave Sim contributed a three-page "Ed the Sock" strip for the first issue of a new *Ed the Sock* comic edited by Sammy Younan. For those who may not be aware, Ed is a huge Canadian celebrity. Dave did a bunch of photorealistic panels of Ed's sexy sidekick Liana K. There are no plans to solicit Diamond, so you'll have to order from the website, www.edthesock.com. The issue may be out by the time you read this.

Longtime *Cerebus* readers Jeff Seiler (words and cover art) and Larry Hart (interior art and dialogue) have collaborated on a comic book that premiered at S.P.A.C.E. 2006, "*Cerebus* Readers in Crisis #1: Coherent and Sane." Dave contributed cover lettering and a single page at the back of the book. This is the first issue of what is hoped to be an ongoing series of illustrated stories by *Cerebus* readers. This black and white comic book has a cover that was colored by cover technician Jeff Tundis, another longtime *Cerebus* reader. An additional volume, "The Making Of '*Cerebus* Readers in Crisis #1,'" is available as well. It includes a transcription of e-mails and letters between Larry and Jeff, and between Jeff and Dave (letters only). It also includes copies of sketches and rough drafts. A limited number of signed and numbered first editions is available by mail by contacting Jeff Seiler at 14500 Marsh Lane, #176, Addison, TX 75001 or by calling 214-684-6089. The cost for the signed and numbered first edition is $6 per copy. The unsigned, unnumbered second edition is $3.50 per copy. All prices include standard costs for domestic postage. The cost for the additional volume is $4.00 per copy. The comic and the companion volume can be ordered in tandem for $9.00 (first edition), or $7.00 (second edition).

Ye Bookes of Cerebus will be moving to the Salt Lake City Library for three months in the fall, and Dave and Gerhard will be making a personal appearance. Details in our next issue!

Jeff Lorenz of Villa Park, Illinois has finished his year-long project of scanning all of the covers and back-of-the-book material from issues 1-300 onto DVD. Dave is hoping to have it commercially available before the end of the year.

Dave is hoping to have future volumes of *Collected Letters* available via a Print on Demand online outfit in hundred-page volumes (with indexes!). There isn't enough demand through Diamond to support doing any more *Collected Letters* phone books. As it stands, Dave has enough letters between June 2004 (the end of *Dave Sim: Collected Letters 2004)* and December 2005 to fill fifteen such books. Details to come!

And that's all, folks. Be here next time for our deluxe, giant-size Neal Adams issue!

Thou Good and Faithful Cerebite by Bryan Douglas